

Poetry from the seaside

At the start of the school year when many children have recently returned from holidays at the seaside, it may be a good moment to use this as a topic to inspire some creative poetry writing. Although the idea of asking children to write a poem in a foreign language may initially appear to be an impossibly daunting task, there are a number of ways in which it can be turned into an enjoyable and achievable activity which provides purposeful and clearly focussed language practice and also develops a range of social and thinking skills.

Some examples of poetry writing activities based on the topic of the seaside are as follows:

1. Five senses poems

Draw a simple web on the board. Write *The seaside* in the centre and the verbs *see, hear, smell, taste* and *touch* arranged around this. Ask the children to close their eyes for a moment and to remember and/or imagine things they can see, hear, smell, taste and touch at the seaside. Ask the children to open their eyes, elicit their ideas and write them in the appropriate place in the web on the board. Use this as an opportunity to revise or introduce vocabulary related to the seaside. Once

you have added all the children's ideas to the web, *either* use this to build up a poem with the whole class *or* divide the class into pairs and, after eliciting or suggesting one or two example lines, get the children to write a poem based on the web with their partner. An example of a poem using this technique is as follows:

*At the seaside,
I can see blue sea and grey sky,
I can hear the wind and the waves,
I can smell the sea,
I can taste the salt,
And I can touch the soft, yellow sand.*

Once the children are ready you can invite a few pairs to read their poems to the class. Children can also illustrate their poems and these can then be displayed on the class noticeboard or made into a class book.

2. Preposition poems

Either ask the children to tell you prepositions of place they know e.g. *under, on, in, by, next to, near, above* etc or elicit these by talking about people and things in the classroom e.g. *Isabel is ... (next to) David*. Write the title of the poem *The sea* and a list of the prepositions on the board. Divide the class into pairs and ask them to write one sentence about the sea using one of the prepositions which you assign them e.g. *Under the sea it's dark and cold*. When all the children are ready, ask them to take turns to say their sentences and thereby build up an instant poem e.g. *Under*

the sea it's dark and cold, In the sea fish swim together, On the sea are little boats... If you like children can then take turns to dictate their sentences to the rest of the class and write out and illustrate the poem.

3. Wall poems

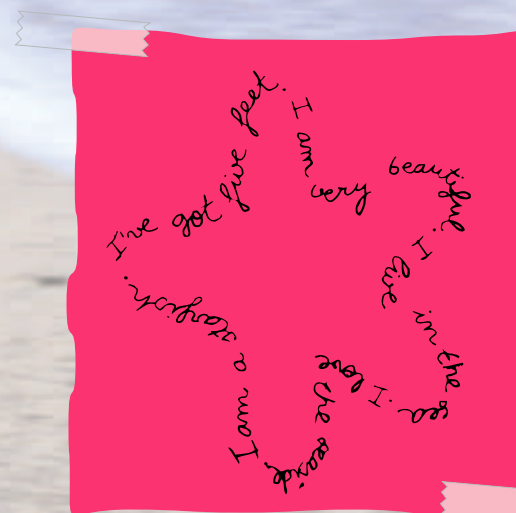
A wall poem is a poem which is built up collaboratively through the contributions of individual children over time. Stick a large piece of paper on the noticeboard and write a title at the top e.g. *The seaside*. Write a first line to start the poem off e.g. *I love the seaside*. Invite the children to add lines to the poem in any order and whenever they feel like it, either at suitable moments during the lesson or in their breaks and lunch times. The lines can either be phrases or complete sentences. Watch the poem grow over time.

*I love the seaside,
Hot sun and salty sea,
Ice cream on the sand,
Football and frisbee,
A dog running,
A girl sleeping.*

If you like, you can also invite the children to draw pictures on the sheet of paper to illustrate the lines they add to the poem. Once the paper is full and the poem is finished, you may like to ask the children to suggest additions, cuts or changes to the word and/or line order to improve the poem.

4. Shaped poems

Explain what you mean by a shaped poem, that is a poem which is written and laid out in such a way that it also shows a picture of what is being described. Demonstrate this by eliciting sentences about the sea e.g. *The sea is salty, The sea is blue, The sea is calm* etc and write them in wavy lines on the board so that they also make a picture of the sea. Ask the children to suggest ideas for other things you find at the seaside to be the subject of a shaped poem e.g. seaweed, starfish, crab, fish, shell. Divide the class into pairs. Ask the children to first of all write six sentences about the object they choose and then make them into a shaped poem. When they have finished, children can pass round and read each other's poems and look at the pictures and these can also be displayed.



5. Shell poems

Have a collection of shells ready (enough to give one to each pair in the class). Prepare and photocopy a task sheet with questions and space for the children to note answers as follows:

*What is it?
How does it feel when you touch it?
Where do you find it?
What other words describe it?
What size and shape is it?
What does it make you think of?
What colour is it?
What does it make you feel?*

Divide the class into pairs. Give each pair a shell to look at and a task sheet to complete. Once the children are ready, get them to write out their answers in the form of a poem. Once they have written a draft, encourage them to cut, add or change words in order to improve their poems. Here is an example of a poem using this technique.

*A shell,
On the wet sand,
Like a small plate,
White and pink,
Smooth and shiny,
I think of the sea,
I feel happy.*



In conclusion, there are many wide-ranging benefits to using poetry writing activities, such as the ones suggested above, in language classes with children. These can be based on a topic such as the sea-side or any other topic of your choice, for example, the seasons. Poetry writing activities provide a framework for creativity and success within the children's limited linguistic competence. They provide clearly focussed language practice as well as opportunities to develop a sense of rhythm, extend vocabulary and introduce children to the notion of process writing and showing

willingness to draft and revise their written work. Through poetry writing activities such as the ones described, children also develop social skills, such as collaborating and turn-taking, thinking skills, such as deducing and inferring, and visual skills, such as closely observing and using the mind's eye to envisage places or things. Finally, poetry writing provides contexts which not only allow for personal, divergent responses but also lead to memorable outcomes through the enormous sense of achievement children get at being able to produce a poem in a language which is not their own.

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