

# Everything Touches

A reading and performance activity KS2  
National Poetry Day 2013 by Mandy Coe

*Based on poems by Roger McGough and Wes Magee*

*Humankind has not woven the web of life.  
We are but one thread within it.  
Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.  
All things are bound together.  
All things connect.*

*Chief Seattle, 1854*



**R**ich with images and contrasts the poem, *Everything Touches*, by Roger McGough, celebrates an idea echoed in faiths and beliefs of peoples around the world... that everything is connected. The theme of 'Water' is a perfect way to explore issues of connectivity within science, nature and the environment. Here a few ways to enjoy this poem through reading and performance.



## (i) Reading

It is worth emphasising that poems are a bit like puzzles or music, so no one is meant to 'get' a poem all at once. People who read poetry come to enjoy this feeling of fresh discovery on rereading. Another way to relax new readers of poetry is to make it clear that poetry is deeply subjective; *each one of us will translate a poem differently.*

- Invite someone to read the poem aloud, or a few people to read a verse each. See if there are any unfamiliar words or phrases, such as a death-cap (which is a type of poisonous mushroom). Or an atom (one of the building blocks of the universe).
- When you have read the poem, see if there is something you remembered about it. It might be something that puzzles you, or a line or phrase you like.
- Did you notice any rhymes?
- Are any lines repeated?
- The phrases, *atom to atom*, and, *The universe in a crystal of snow* are a bit of a puzzle. What do you think they might mean?
- If you were to draw something in the poem, what would it be?
- The poem talks about how one thing affects another. What is the largest thing mentioned in the poem? What is the smallest?
- Which words or phrases tell you this journey is important?

# Get physical!

To explore the idea of being connected, play a game called 'pass the squeeze'. In a group stand in a circle holding hands, one person squeezes a hand and that squeeze is passed on to the person next to them and so on; it is passed around the circle until it comes back to the first person. If you want to make it even more fun, send a squeeze off in both directions!

# Get Thirsty!

To understand the sense of distance and timescales of the poem, pour a glass of water and ask a few questions. How old do you think this water is? Where has it come from? What is it made of? To understand what the glass holds, click [here](#) for a short children's film (2.5mins) at BBC Education about the water cycle. Click [here](#) for posters and information on the water cycle in other languages.



## (ii) Performance:

This poem is perfect for performance, try allocating one verse to a few groups in order to script it for more than one voice.

Make copies of the poems and invite each group to try something unique. Let them test the performances out on the class to get feedback on what works best.

Beyond the simplest level of one person per line, lies a wealth of possibilities. It's worth considering:

- Pauses - silence is as important as sound.
- Can pace and speed can affect/enhance meaning?
- Try layering voices by repetition of certain words or phrases.
- Contrast a solo voice with multiple voices.
- Back the reading with whispered phrases.
- Movements.
- Audience participation, remember you can use your audience to: perform an action, repeat a phrase with you, close their eyes and imagine something.
- Perform the poem as a whole to your year-group or school.
- Consider using music, lighting or projection of images and text to enhance mood.

The Poem follows on the next page.

# Everything Touches

by Roger McGough

Everything touches, life interweaves  
Starlight and wood-smoke, ashes and leaves  
Birdsong and thunder, acid and rain  
Everything touches, unbroken chain

Rainstorm and rainbow, warrior and priest  
Stingray and dolphin, beauty and beast  
Heartbeat and high tide, ebb tide and flow  
The universe in a crystal of snow

Snowdrop and death-cap, hangman and clown  
Walls that divide come tumbling down  
Seen through the night, the glimmer of day  
Life is but darkness worn away

Blackness and whiteness, sunset and dawn  
Those gone before, yet to be born  
Past and future, distance and time  
Atom to atom, water to wine

Look all around and what do you see?  
Everything touches, you're touching me  
Look all around and what do you see?  
Everything touches, you're touching me.

From **Lucky**  
Frances Lincoln Children's Books

## (iii) Writing activity

Become one drop of water and send yourself on a journey. Speak in the voice of that drop of water and two or three fragments of your adventure. You could be in a flask being carried across the Sahara, you could be in a loch in Scotland, you could be in a snowflake on an African mountain top, you could be in a drop of sweat of an Olympic athlete.

Wes Magee's poem, [The Red Boat](#), shows how simple a poem can be, and yet still allows us to see huge scenes within it. Create your water drop's journey in two verses, four lines in each. It is the second and fourth line that rhymes – if you want it to – but you can also write a poem with no rhymes. Write the poem out twice. One version should be in big, coloured letters. This version can be made into a paper boat and glued onto your other sheet for display. Click [here](#) for how to make an origami boat.

### The Red Boat

Here goes the sun  
slowly sailing by,  
like a red boat  
on the ocean of the sky.

There goes the sun  
all the day through,  
a red boat sailing  
across its sea of blue.

Wes Magee, *Here Come the Creatures!* (Frances Lincoln Children's Books)

## (iv) Water-cycle poster, more poems and resources

Other Poems suitable for KS2 available at [www.nationalpoetry.co.uk](http://www.nationalpoetry.co.uk):

[Tornado](#) Rachel Rooney, *The Language of Cat*, (Frances Lincoln Children's Books)

[All in Time to the Music](#) Roger McGough, *Lucky*, (Frances Lincoln Children's Books)

[Peepshow](#) Roger McGough, *Lucky*, (Frances Lincoln Children's Books)

[Handfish](#) Roger McGough, *Imaginary Menagerie*, (Frances Lincoln Children's Books)

[Jazz River](#) Tony Mitton, *Come Into This Poem*, (Frances Lincoln)

[Three Ships](#) Tony Mitton, *Come Into This Poem*, (Frances Lincoln)

[The Salt Boy](#) Tony Mitton, *Come Into This Poem*, (Francis Lincoln)

[Mermaid's Lament](#) Rachel Rooney, *The Language of Cats*, (Frances Lincoln Children's Books)

[Fishing](#) Rachel Rooney, *The Language of Cats*, (Frances Lincoln Children's Books)

### Full internet addresses for links

Full address for posters and information on the water cycle in other languages:

<http://ga.water.usgs.gov/edu/watercycle-kids.html>

Full address for the children's film (2.5mins) at BBC Education about the water cycle:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/the-water-cycle/11070.html>