



National Poetry Day is a nationwide celebration of poetry held on the first Thursday in October. Since 1994 it has shaken poetry from its dust-jacket into the nations' schools, playgrounds, streets, offices, shops, train stations and airwaves, through live events, happenings, classroom activities, conversations, broadcasts, tweets and spontaneous uncontrollable outbursts of poetry. This year National Poetry Day is Thursday 2nd October 2014. Every year we suggest a theme to inspire events and contributions, and this year's is Remember.

Forward Arts Foundation, a charity committed to widening poetry's audience, runs National Poetry Day and the Forward Prizes for Poetry. It publishes the Forward Book of Poetry, an indispensable annual anthology of the year's best poems.



R

is for...



R is for... Remember

An KS3/4 activity by Forward Prize-winning poet Kate Clanchy for First Story

www.firststory.org.uk 

From **I Remember**
by Joe Brainard

I remember when, in high school, if you wore green and yellow on Thursday it meant that you were queer.
I remember when, in high school, I used to stuff a sock in my underwear.
I remember that for my fifth birthday all I wanted was an off-one-shoulder black satin evening gown. I got it. And I wore it to my birthday party.
I remember my parents' bridge teacher. She was very fat and very butch (cropped hair) and she was a chain smoker. She prided herself on the fact that she didn't have to carry matches around. She lit each new cigarette from the old one. She lived in a little house behind a restaurant and lived to be very old.

I Remember is a very strange short book, somewhere between prose and poetry, by the New York artist Joe Brainard. Its formula is very simple: each paragraph begins 'I remember'. Other writers have taken the project on: there are great examples by Wendy Cope and Paul Farley.

Start your workshop by reading the poem. Students will usually take on the tone and form of the piece intuitively, but it can be worth reminding them to use concrete detail, and perhaps expressly forbidding analysis. Have a long chat about details: the sweet brands of youth, the exact names playground games were called, nicknames, and often, visits to other/home countries. Then ask the students to write their own.

In these examples, two very different teenagers produced very different versions...

I Won't Forget 
By Esme Partridge

I Remember... 
By Aaron Smith

In these examples, two very different teenagers, both First Story students at Oxford Spires Academy, produced very different versions.

R is for... Reading out loud

A KS1/KS2 activity by the Poetry Society & Southbank Centre

www.southbankcentre.co.uk 
www.poetrysociety.org.uk 

Children often struggle to develop confidence reading poetry out loud. One way to build their confidence is to experiment with reading poems in lots of different ways, and to make it as fun as possible.

With your class, choose some poetry to read. It could be a short poem or just a couple of lines depending on age and ability. It might be a favourite class poem or you could have a look on the **Children's Poetry Archive**. 

Ask your class to repeat the lines, reading aloud or under their breaths until they are familiar with them.

Then ask your class to suggest different ways to read the poem; these can include

- emotions (happy, angry),
- directions (slow motion, as if you were an opera singer),
- actions (performing kung fu moves on each beat, whilst hopping). They should write these on a slip of paper and put them in a hat to be drawn out later. Allow the class to be as imaginative as possible, though it might be an idea to vet some of the suggestions!

If possible get the class to stand in a circle, or where they can all see each other. Each child then takes a slip of paper and will perform the poem in that style.

Go round listening to the performances, but – importantly – after each person reads, the class must perform back to them, copying their actions and intonation. This helps reassure the reader that there's no wrong way to read the poem! The more energetic their reading is, the more energetic the response will be.

After each performance the class can guess the directions that the reader was given.

E

is for...



E is for... Evoke

An activity for all ages by Georgi Gill for the Scottish Poetry Library

www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk 

Smell and taste are recognised to be the most evocative of the five senses and have the ability to spark powerful and often deeply buried memories.

So why not smell the coffee or eat that sticky sweet bun? Sniff the roses or taste castor oil? OK, maybe not the last one, but pick a smell or taste that you experience today and use it as a prompt for a poem.

Consider these questions before you write:

- **Where does the smell take you?**
- **Try to create a wider picture**
– what sounds did you hear?
- **What did you see?**
- **What happened?**
- **What did you feel**
– literally or emotionally?

Example poem:

An rathad / A white road 

by Derick Thomson

M

is for...



M is for... Memories

A KS1/KS2 activity by The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education

www.clpe.org.uk

www.poetryline.org.uk

From *In the Land of Giants* by George Szirtes

The cloud's hair

Which can be brushed out long and fine
to lie across a pillow
or bunched and scrunched into an angry
knot of rain before it is undone,
when long hanks of it hang
over the horizon like curtains,
the whole sky shaking
its beautiful dense head.

Take some time to cloud gaze. Find a comfortable spot outside and watch the clouds go by. This place will form the inspiration for your poem.

As you cloud gaze think about:

- the different shapes and sizes you can see
- the feeling of the breeze on your skin
- the shades of colour in the sky
- the physical sensations you might have
- feelings you might have

Either:

- find an image of the sky
- find a collection of images of the sky and make a collage
- draw a picture of the sky based on your observations

Take some time to look very carefully at the photograph or drawing and note down words and phrases that represent what you saw, heard, smelt and felt when cloud gazing.

Use the words you have collected which connect most strongly with your memory of the sky to make sentences that best describe the parts of the sky that you remember most vividly.

Write your sentences directly on to your image. The sentences/ phrases do not need to be written in a straight line or particular order. They can be written in different directions and follow the shapes and detail of the image underneath.

M is for... Mix it up

A KS3/KS4 activity by the Poetry Society & Southbank Centre

www.southbankcentre.co.uk 
www.poetrysociety.org.uk 

Poets often spend a lot of time thinking about how to structure their poems and the order in which they will reveal information to us. Thinking about this can be an interesting way to begin exploring a poem.

Begin by photocopying a poem or poems for your class and then cutting them up so that each stanza is on a different slip of paper. If you have shorter poems try this with individual lines or couplets.

Give these out to the class, or to small groups, and ask them to arrange them in the order they like, discussing their choices.

Read out the different versions and discuss how they arrived at each different order.

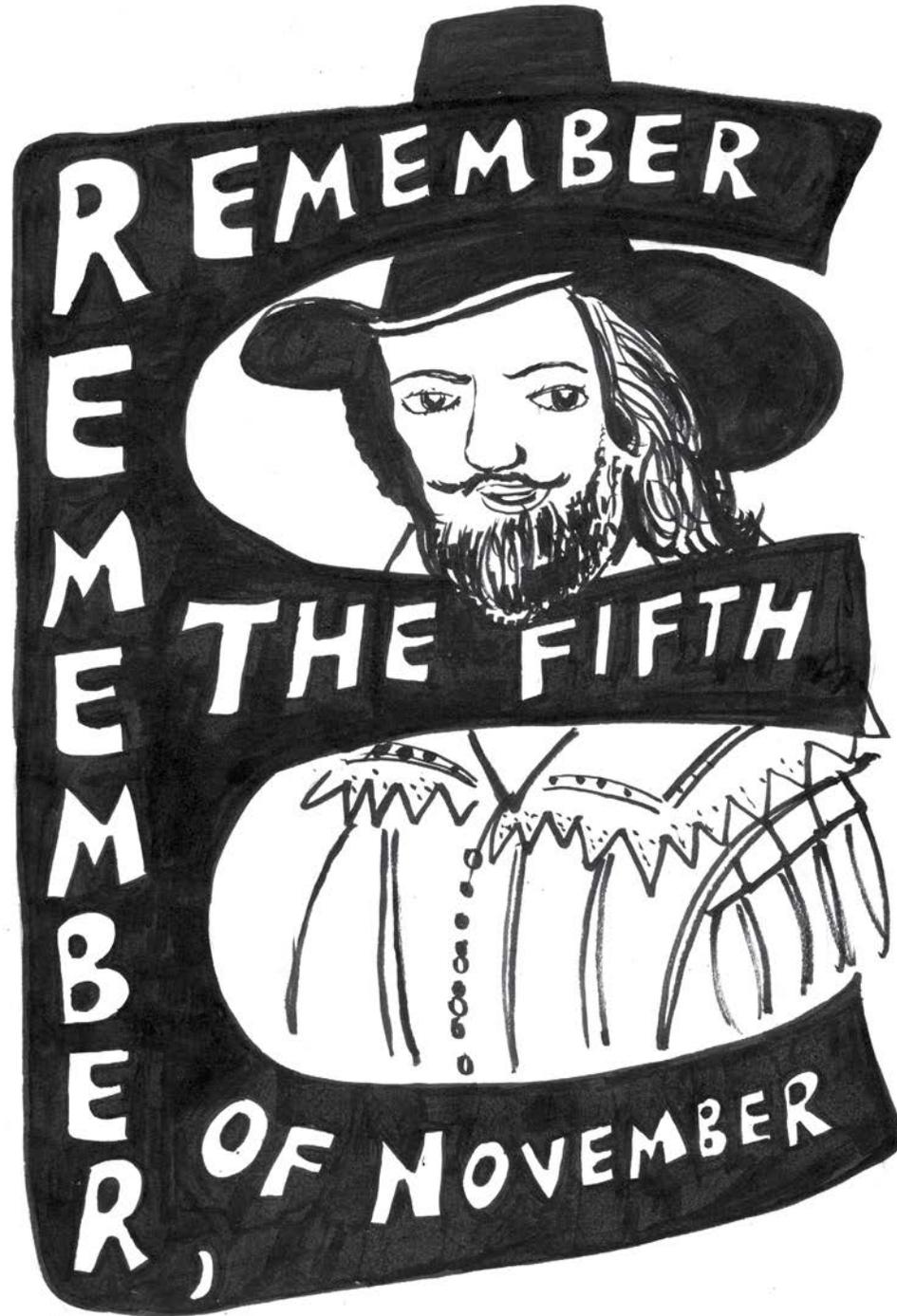
Remind students that as long as the poem makes sense for them there is no right or wrong answer.

Some useful poems to try:

- **Fishbones Dreaming** 
by Matthew Sweeney
- **Because I could not stop for Death** 
by Emily Dickinson
- **The Accident** 
by Tallulah Hutson
- **Reach/Throw/Wade/Row** 
by Phoebe Stuckes
- **Fire Knows** 
by Jesse Rodrigues

E

is for...



E for... Epitaph

KS1/KS2 activity by Celia Warren for Schofield & Sims, on behalf of Forward Arts Foundation

An epitaph is a short poem or a phrase which remembers a person who has died or something that has gone forever. The epitaph below is written in memory of a snowman that melted when the sun came out.

Dear Snowman by Celia Warren

As white as a cloth on a table,
As white as a cloud in the sky,
As white as the paper I write on,
As white as dots on a die,
As white as the frame round the window,
where I sit and look out feeling blue,
Last night, while I slept, you melted,
and nothing is white without you.

- Before writing an epitaph, think of something special that you have lost, (or an event that you will never experience again), such as a missing toy, a tree that has been cut down, or a birthday cake that has been eaten.
- Choose one item or event to write about and put in your title, for example, **Dear Teddy**, **Dear Tree** or **Dear Birthday Cake**.
- Draw a picture of the thing you have chosen. Think about how it looked, felt, smelt, sounded and, maybe, what it tasted like. Write a list of these descriptions, including as much detail as you can remember.
- Use this list to write a list of 'as ... as' similes describing everything that you loved about this item or event, for example:

As soft as a pile of feathers
As high as the London Eye
As sticky as a melted lolly
- Look at your list of similes and choose the five that best describe your item or event. These five similes will be the lines of the epitaph.
- Build your poem by writing the five simile lines underneath the title, thinking carefully about the order you put them in. Could any of the similes be improved, so that the poem has a stronger rhythm or rhyme? Could you develop the poem to include wordplay, like the last line of **Dear Snowman**? Will the reader be able to picture what you are describing in the epitaph?
- Once you are happy with the order of your similes, write the last line of the epitaph, ending with the words 'without you'. The last line should show how you feel about losing this item, or the event being over, for example:

And I am lost without you
And nothing's the same without you
And everything's strange without you

M

is for...



M is for... Martin's meaning machine

A KS2 activity by Young People's Laureate for Wales Martin Daws for Literature Wales

www.literaturewales.org  www.youngpeopleslaureate.org 

A simple device for creating a meaningful poem in a few easy stages.

Stage 1.

Finish this line:

Remember means _____
(e.g. Remember means Past)

Move the word at the end of line 1 to the start of line 2 and then finish the line off, without repeating any words.

_____ means _____
(e.g. Past means History)

And again

_____ means _____
(e.g. History means Roots)

Stage 2.

List the four words in the middle of the page.

e.g. Remember
Past
History
Roots

Begin the first line with "I remember" and finish it with a memory.

For example, I remember your garden

Write a line for each one of the remaining three words, for example:

I remember your garden → (this is about my Grandmother)
flowers border your path to the past → (see what I did there with path and past?)
lead me into your history → (I'm at it again with lead and me!)
barefoot over a lawn edged with love → (OMG I'm alliterating lead, lawn, love)
held close among my roots

Stage 3.

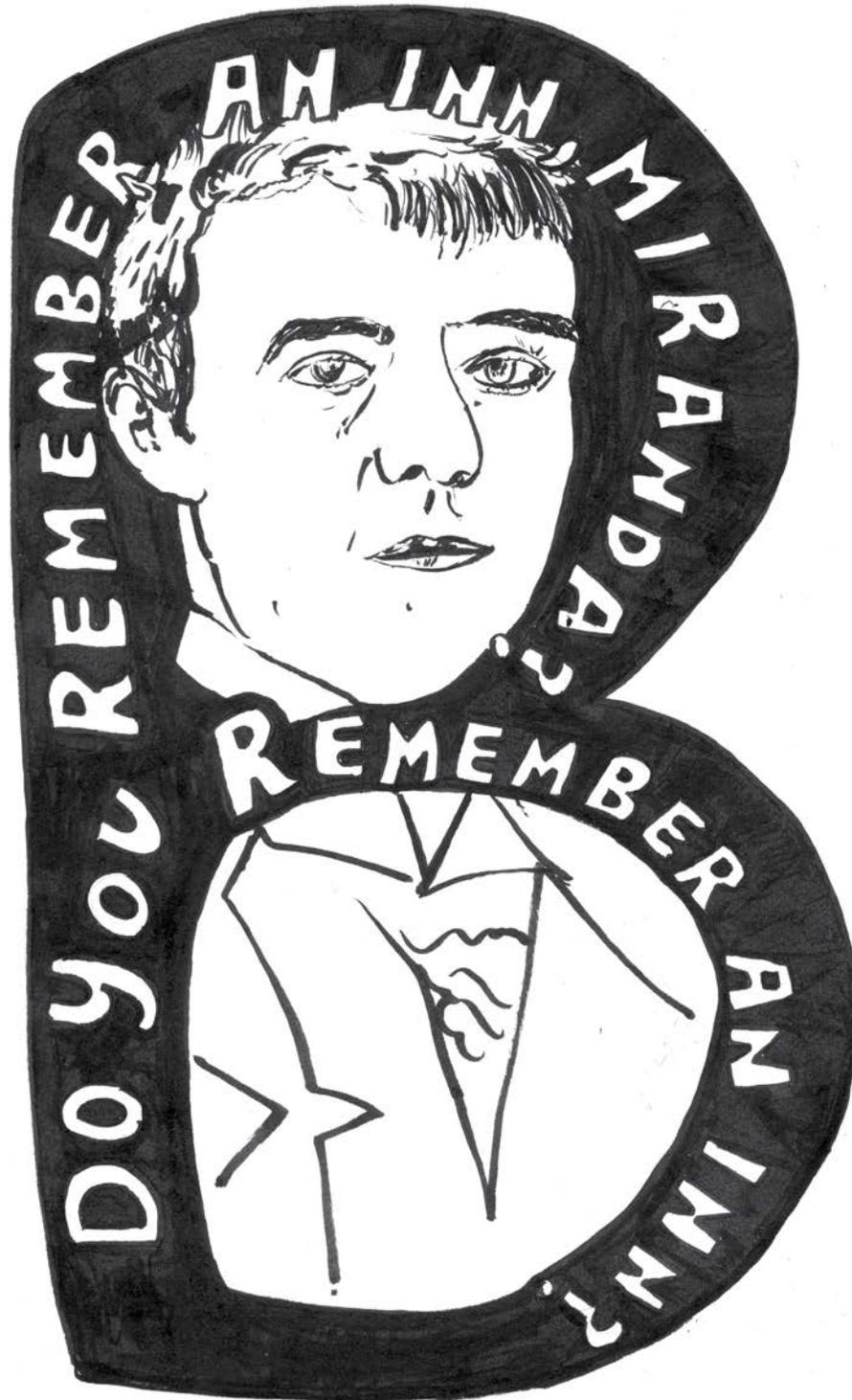
Draft this as a poem by adding words/cutting words/changing words and writing more lines in any way that you like.

**I remember your garden
it's a path to the past
leading me barefoot
a lawn edged with love
flowers seem dreamlike
secret among my roots
under the magnolia tree ...(tbc)**

Keep working at it until you are satisfied that it is as good as it can be.

B

is for...



B is for... Blue remembered hills

An activity for all ages by Wrecking Ball Press

www.wreckingballpress.com 

Into my heart an air that kills
by A.E. Housman

Into my heart an air that kills
From yon far country blows
What are those blue remembered hills,
What spires, what farms are those ?

That is the land of lost content,
I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again.

- How does the poem make you feel?
- How reliable is the memory when writing about the past?
- What does the poet mean by 'blue remembered hills'?
- Identify a time or place when you were really happy. What made it so idyllic?
- Why might the poet not be able to return to the land of lost content?
- Could you go back to that place? Would it be the same?
- If something is described as 'nostalgic' what does that mean?
- Write a short poem inspired by your memory and your feelings about that time.

E

is for...



E is for... Existence

An activity for all ages by poet Laurie Bolger for Apples and Snakes

www.applesandsnakes.org 

On a blank sheet of paper list the following:

5 objects that you have now.
For example, your shoes, your favourite mug, your pillow...

5 objects that you remember having once.
For example, the scarf that you lost, your red umbrella...

5 objects that someone you know has.
For example, granddad's glasses, mum's greenhouse...

Next, turn over your page and write a short letter addressed to yourself signed from that object.

For example:

Dear Laurie

I really thought we hit things off, I did. I kept you dry in the rain and always waited for you by the doors of shops.

Why did you have to leave me on the bus floor? Now I am no use to you. I wish you'd hold my hand again.

Remember Paris? When you turned me inside out and spun me round pretending you were Mary Poppins and that I could make you fly over the top of roofs. I always respected your blow-dried hair and new shoes. I kept you looking great.

I feel useless now, folded down and soggy. Come back to me.

Yours sincerely

Your Yellow Umbrella

Now in turn speak your letter aloud. When these pieces are spoken in the various 'voices' of the object sending the letter, they are really entertaining.

R

is for...



R is for... Recall and record

An activity for all ages by poet Rebecca Goss for the Writers' Centre Norwich

www.writerscentrenorwich.org.uk 

From **Five-finger exercise**
by Tiffany Atkinson

**We have walked
your palm this quiet afternoon,
its genteel**

**districts, buffed the knuckles' pebbles
and sampled the intimate waxes of
your fingernails**

In this exercise, take some time to ramble around your own hands. Look at them closely, the aim being to recall and record significant memories associated with them. From this, you will write a poem.

On a separate sheet of paper, draw around your hand. Then annotate that drawing, following these pointers:

- Atkinson describes knuckles as 'pebbles'. How would you describe yours? Use simile and metaphor to highlight your hands' physical details.
- Have your hands inherited certain characteristics from specific members of your family? Record any similarities – and any memory associated with those similarities.
- Describe the things your hands can do: their role in your job, their role when you're being a parent/friend/relative – what are your hands' responsibilities? What have they 'done'?
- Record any memory related to a specific part of the hand – i.e. your wedding finger, that scar on your thumb, and so on.
- Think of what the hands have touched. Try and remember something important associated with this sense.
- Now find the 'trigger' for a poem. Which memory/annotation could you develop into a poem? Think of an arresting image that can evoke the past successfully.

Having found your trigger, write freely for 20 minutes. Stop and read what you have written. Words and lines will stand out. Start to think about stanzas, from here you can draft and refine your poem into shape.

R is for... Recite

An activity for all ages by the Poetry By Heart team of the Poetry Archive

www.poetrybyheart.org.uk 
www.poetryarchive.org 

1

Find a poem to love
– explore libraries, websites
and anthologies!

2

Learn it by heart
– find memory techniques
that work for you.

3

Practise saying it aloud
– think about how
to use your voice.

4

Recite it to your friends,
family, classmates
– or just your dog!