

## Old Possum's Children's Poetry Competition 2010

### Teachers' guide

**If you know a child or class who would like to enter, UK poet Mandy Coe gives practical tips on getting started, plus her pick of poems on the theme of 'Home'.**

#### **HOME SWEET HOME: *exploring the theme***

What do these have in common... a nest, burrow, shell, kennel, flowerpot, Brazilian rainforest, refugee camp, beehive, fairytale castle, garden pond, zoo, Atlantic, Antarctic, a spider's web? Each one is a home!

This universal theme provides a wonderful opportunity for schools to explore a subject dear to all of us. Our relationship with 'home' is at the centre of our life: leaving it, returning to it, creating it, losing it. It encompasses the everyday taken-for-granted as well as the experiences of refugees. It includes the cross-curricular possibilities of habitat-as-home for animals - and historical events such as the evacuation of children during the Second World War. From an attic room to the blue planet itself, we all need a home!

#### **WARM UPS: *gathering ideas***

- Invent a recipe for a sense of home: family, safety, culture, familiar streets, food etc.
- Write a shopping list for an actual home: a white front door, a blue kitchen table, a picture of an uncle, a silver can-opener. Include sounds and smells.
- List five things to do to make someone feel at home.
- Describe six homes for animals, such as seabed, orchard, burrow, iceberg or cage.
- Think of four other places where we also feel at home... the country/town, in our body, our skin, in our own county/country, the planet?

#### **WRITING THE POEM: *character, form, titles and redrafting***

**Character**- the children can write as an 'observer' or in 'first person' (autobiographically or as a fictional character). They can be human, animal or inanimate object; the poem can be set in any time period. The homes can be real or drawn from literature (stories, books or film).

**Form-** the poems do not have to rhyme. Encourage children to write the first-draft as prose or free verse. For examples of poems in a wide variety of forms try [The Works 8 \(Macmillan\)](#) or visit [The Children's Poetry Archive](#) online in the classroom.

**Titles-** have a huge impact! They can tempt you; be funny, short, long. They can also set the context (freeing the poem from explaining the where/what/when and who).

**Redrafting-** give children time to put their work aside and see it with fresh eyes a day later. Read the poems aloud, encourage feedback by each child asking one question and mentioning one line/image they like. When rewriting invite pupils to:

- reorder lines; first lines and last lines should be strong and may be buried in the poem
- play with language, repetition, line lengths
- replace unintentionally repeated words
- see if small words such as *can, and, it* can be cut or replaced with a comma
- check consistency of tense and persona
- if a 'model' poem is used, leave enough time for the poet's voice and choices to develop (if the work still mirrors the sample poem, refer to it under the title, e.g. *after Luck of Life, by Jenny Joseph*)
- read the competition rules carefully, check legibility of names and poems

**EMBEDDING:** *include the whole school*

Invite a poet to visit; display or perform the poems; hold an in-school competition and invite a panel of children to judge the work. Photocopy poems onto school mail-outs; feature them on the school website; reduce them and put them inside visitors' badges; send some to the local paper!

**DOWNLOADABLE POEMS:** *on the theme of home*

(Book titles with links can also be ordered from the Children's Poetry Bookshelf by clicking on them).

**No.115 Dreams** Jackie Kay, from [The Thing that Mattered Most](#) (Scottish Poetry Library)

**There Was An Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe**, anon, from [My First Oxford Book of Poems](#) (OUP)

**House Blessing**, Navajo Native American blessing, from [Mouth to Mouth](#): Poems from Around the World (Walker Books)

**ONLINE IN THE CLASSROOM**

Read and hear these poems at the Poetry Archive:

[Tempest House](#) Ian McMillan

[Childhood Tracks](#) James Berry

[A Small Dragon](#) Brian Patten

[The Lake Isle of Innisfree](#) William Butler Yeats

[Dusk, Burnham-Overy-Staithe](#) Kevin Crossley-Holland

Happy writing and best of luck!

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