

Personification Poetry

Verse from a different point of view

Writing poetry inspired by Shakespeare's plays is a great way to cement understanding and celebrate learning, particularly around specific scenes. Once pupils begin to think themselves part of the scenery, their imaginations seem to more easily 'fill in' the space around them, taking in not just the physical space but the atmosphere and mood in the room. The chandelier in the Capulet's Hall has a completely unique view of Romeo and Juliet's first meeting and Personification Poetry is a perfect framework to capture this. The collaborative nature of the activity takes all the initial pressure off, yet every child will end up with their own original poem – and their own vision of a key moment in the play.



Key Stage: KS2

Outcomes:

Greater understanding of, and insight into, a specific scene in your chosen Shakespeare play.
Individual poems by all pupils.

Preparation:

Print the prompt questions on to A4 paper, and stick each one to a piece of flipchart or A2 paper. These can be laid out on tables or stuck to the wall, depending on your preference. Leave a few felt-pens by each.

Instructions:

- 1) Choose an object from a Shakespeare play of your choice (or get the pupils to pick something). From *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, you might choose a large oak from the fairy woodland.
- 2) Ask the pupils to imagine that the object can see, hear, smell and has memory – just like a human.
- 3) Now ask them to imagine they are that object. You are going to place a series of prompts, attached to a blank piece of flipchart, around the room. Children will work in small teams of three or four. The teams will carousel around the flipcharts, spending around three minutes at each one, discussing the prompt and writing their responses on the flipchart.

Teams only move on to the next prompt when they are all instructed to do so, allowing you to manage this part of the activity. Each time they reach a new prompt pupils should be encouraged to read what the previous teams have written and see if they can think of new and even better responses.

Suggested prompts:

- What can you see?
- What noises do you hear?
- What kinds of things do you hear people say?
- What are you thinking to yourself?
- What do you remember?
- How do you feel?
- What are you saying?
- What do you dream of?



4) Once every team has responded to every prompt ask the children to come and sit in front of the whiteboard, with one from each team bringing the flipchart from their last prompt. You are going to model how, by selecting some words and phrases that particularly appeal to you and placing them in an order of your choice, you can "build" a poem of borrowed ideas.

5) Ask the pupils to call out responses from the flipchart and as they do this, begin to piece your favourites together, giving them poetic form. It is a good idea to ask the children at this stage "What makes a poem a poem?". They will probably list rhyme and rhythm. Explain that these poems are not necessarily going to rhyme; It's their rhythm that will mark them out as poetry rather than prose.

6) You don't have to stick exactly to the words and phrases as the children read them out – to create shape you can alter them slightly to give a more 'poetic' effect – but they should still recognisably emanate from the pupils' responses. A simple way to give shape to your poem is to choose one or two lines to be repeated like a chorus, which can be very effective. To make this process easier for yourself, it is advisable to pick a few choice phrases while the pupils are travelling around the carousel. That way you can have an idea of where you are going to take your poem before you start this section of the activity.

7) very few lines stop and read aloud together the poem so far. Speaking it together in this way helps to emphasise the rhythm for the whole group, ensuring that as the poem grows it develops a coherent form. You only need to compose a short poem, before instructing the pupils, in pairs, to follow the same process and write poems of their own. They can now harvest their own choice of generate words an phrases, arranging them to create original verses.

Other Possible Shakespearean objects:

- **The Tempest:** The cloven pine on Prospero's Island, Prospero's staff
- **Hamlet:** The tapestry behind which Polonius hides, the gravedigger's spade
- **Romeo and Juliet:** A statue in the sepulchre, a column in the Capulets' hall
- **Henry V:** The blacksmith's anvil

An example Personification Poem, from one of our A Midsummer Night's Dream workshops:

Oh, the things I have seen here in this wood
That mischievous fairy is up to no good
Those lovers rowing, tearful and tired
Chasing and shouting, hurt and betrayed.
If I could talk, I'd tell them "it's magic –
Now go back home and leave me in peace!"
I remember when this wood was quiet
And I could hear the breeze in my branches
But there's strange things happening in my wood tonight...
Was that a donkey I just saw?!
Oh, the things I have seen here in this wood
That mischievous fairy is up to no good

