

The Poetry Takeover: A Creative Collaboration

Forward Arts Foundation
& Oxford Spire Academy

kindly supported by the Rothschild Foundation

This is the story
of how poetry can
change a school.

The story has
many beginnings
and is not yet over,
but let us start
with *The Forward
Book of Poetry*.

Introduction

This is the story of how poetry can change a school. The story has many beginnings and is not yet over, but for the sake of simplicity, let us start with *The Forward Book of Poetry*, an anthology of the year's best poems. The book complements the Forward Prizes, the most important annual awards for poetry published in Britain and Ireland.

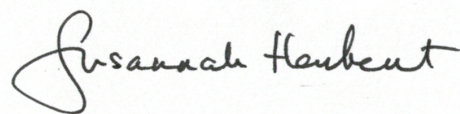
A couple of dozen copies of the 2015 anthology were scattered like bags of seeds at Oxford Spires Academy at the start of the academic year 2014/15.

The poet Kate Clanchy, a teacher and writer-in-residence at the school, had told us she knew students who would gain by reading work by contemporary poets at the top of their game, poems of which nothing had yet been written, poems not yet encrusted with analysis and "correct" responses. The idea was to encourage reading, creative reading, of good contemporary literature. And to see what happened next.

No one involved anticipated quite how successful this initiative – funded by the Rothschild Foundation – would be, nor how its effects would ripple out across the whole school.

This publication, which contains examples of poems from *The Forward Book of Poetry 2015* next to a selection of poems by teenagers inspired by those works, plus three lesson plans, is intended to bear witness to what we have learnt and to encourage other schools to use the poetry celebrated by the annual prizes and books in as wide a variety of ways as possible.

We hope you will be inspired by this to follow the Forward Prizes and to enter the next Forward Young Responses competition, via our website. If you want to stage a Poetry Takeover at your school, let us know and we will help you. Our mission is to celebrate excellence in poetry and widen its audience: with your support we hope to find ever more imaginative ways of doing this.



Susannah Herbert

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The Creative Collaboration

The collaboration of Forward Arts Foundation with Oxford Spires Academy was born out of the bringing together of two far-sighted organisations that promote the enjoyment of reading and writing: the charity First Story which appoints writers-in-residence into ‘challenging schools’ to work with students from a range of different backgrounds, and the charity Give A Book which provides free books for schools, prisons and other institutions.

In late 2013, Give A Book paid for 700 copies of that year’s *Forward Book of Poetry* to be given to pupils and teachers at the annual First Story conference in Oxford.

When canvassing responses, Susannah Herbert of Forward Arts Foundation and Kate Clanchy of First Story’s Oxford Spires realised a free book was just the start... the next steps involved helping students to make its contents their passport to a new enjoyment and understanding of language.

Kate suggested the creation of an annual Forward Young Responses competition, so students could respond to a great contemporary poem with a poem, picture, film, musical composition, translation, adaptation of their own. Together, they adopted a Poetry Manifesto, devised by writer Trevor Millum, a retired teacher: this helped them think about the needs of children at Key Stage 3, an age group (11–13) which seems particularly receptive to poetry. Over the course of one academic year (2014–15), Kate Clanchy used the aims in the Manifesto to plan activities and the poems in *The Forward Book of Poetry* as an inspiration to encourage students from all key stages across the school to engage in and enjoy reading and writing poetry.

The Poetry Manifesto can be found on the Forward Arts Foundation website. Go to:

www.forwardartsfoundation.org/national-poetry-day/resources/

What happened ...

From the outset, the aim was to involve the students as closely as possible, so at the beginning of the school year, *The Forward Book of Poetry 2015* was given to a small, dedicated group of older students. They were asked to choose poems they liked, poems they wanted to respond to, and poems which they felt would work well when explored with younger students. During the year, other poetic activities took place, which were inspired by, but not directly taken from *The Forward Book of Poetry 2015*.

These activities came to demonstrate the wide variety of ways in which creativity spread across the school as a whole.

In all, over 90 students from Years 7 to Years 13 took part.

Kate Clanchy worked closely with teachers and teaching assistants in KS3 weekly workshops spread out over the course of a term and she along with other teachers also worked with KS4 and KS5 students.



Kate Clanchy

First Story Writer-in-Residence
Oxford Spires Academy

Kate writes poetry, short stories, novels and radio plays and is a regular contributor to The Guardian; her work has appeared in The Scotsman, the New Statesman and Poetry Review. She teaches creative writing at the Arvon Foundation and is a Creative Writing Fellow of Oxford Brookes University.

With her creative commitment to Oxford Spires school, many young writers there have achieved great things – including winning the prestigious Foyle Young Poet of the year competition - and poetry has become an integral part of the school.

Susannah Herbert

Executive Director
Forward Arts Foundation

Susannah joined the Forward Arts Foundation in 2012 after a twenty year career as a national newspaper journalist that included editing the books pages of The Sunday Times. She was closely involved with The Evening Standard's award winning Get London Reading campaign.

She is particularly proud to see that a Forward book - *Poems of the Decade* - is now an English Literature A Level set text.

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Reading Group

GCSE & A Level

This was a group of eight students who met weekly after school with Kate Clanchy and sometimes on their own for the first two terms of the school year. They were a mixed background, mixed ability group who came together to read and discuss poetry from *The Forward Book* and then write responses. This group decided which poems would be explored by the younger students in the school.

After much discussion, the group decided to use 'The White Valentine' by Mary Woodward as inspiration for their own responses and also settled on this to be used for Years 10 and 11.

The Reading Group was a great place to get rid of the stress of the day and to be able to think of something other than my AS work. I really enjoyed using published poems as a stimulus for writing my own as using the structure made it easier for me to write a 'good' poem of my own.

Year 12 student

The White Valentine

Mary Woodward

Forward Book of Poetry 2015, p.159

This year, at last, I could send you a valentine –
a white card in a white envelope, your name
and address stuck on in crooked, cut out letters;
but don't worry, there's no ransom note inside.
I have nothing to bargain with or for, nothing.

Your bewilderment will increase as you pull out
the folded card – empty, unmarked,
off white watercolour paper,
rough edges as if torn by hand, the fold
scored with a bone bookmaker's tool. Almost
a work of art in its blankness and lack.

You'll turn it over, hold it up to the light.
Nothing. You'll look at the envelope again.
Postmarked Central London, though I have considered
going to Paris to post it. Almost any city
would have done: Oslo, Anchorage, Helsinki – somewhere
still deep in snow would have been suitable.
A cold gift, a white valentine from a winter place
heart-high in ice, where they speak another language
and the flights out are grounded.

You might throw it away. Or slip it
in one of your books, think about it now and then.
You will never know who sent it. No point even trying to guess.
I vanished from your life so long ago even the idea of youth
is beyond thaw; your name in my old diary hangs
dangerously in a fragile icicle of memory,
this uncreated card as perfect as everything that didn't happen

The White Valentine

The Responses

Envelope

Mackenzie Bilverstone, 15

I would walk
by silent waters and
watch from afar

as you received
the small black envelope
which holds

every burst of light
the moon has given,
every breath you stole from me.

I would watch
the wonder glisten
on your face.

Who has sent this?
There can be no answer.
The fear takes over.

I just wanted you to know
when my life
is filled with darkness

the light
that comes from yours
touches every part of me.

Valentine

Terri-Anne Chambers, 16

This year, I'm not
going to send you a card
covered in paper roses, pink,
purple, the colours of love.

This year there will be no
letter written on laced snow-
flake paper with falling
hearts on the borders.

I don't care if
it would make you happy,
blush as bright
as the red envelope,

It will not be posted, no
not even if I was a thousand
miles away, not
if I was in space,

so you won't open it and see
my name, laugh awkwardly,
treasure the tiniest details – no.
You're not opening that envelope.

Stop asking.

The Reading Group also wrote responses to other poems in the book: several were indirect, dealing with three ideas the group found especially important in these two great poems by Kevin Powers: the photographic image, and the themes of war and home.

Great Plain

Kevin Powers

Forward Book of Poetry 2015, p. 35

Here is where appreciation starts, the boy
in a dusty velour tracksuit almost getting shot.
When I say boy, I mean it. When I say almost
getting shot, I mean exactly that. For bringing
unexploded mortars right up to us
takes a special kind of courage I don't have.
A dollar for each one, I'm told,
on orders from brigade HQ
to let the children do the dirty work.

When I say, I'd say fuck that, let the bastards find them
with the heels of boots and who cares if I mean us
as bastards and who cares if heels of boots mean things
that once were, the way grass once was a green thing
and now is not, the way the muezzin call once was
five times today and now is not

and when I say heel of boot I hope you'll appreciate
that I really mean the gone foot, any one of us

timbered and inert and when I say green
I mean like fucking Nebraska, wagon wheels on the prairie
and other things that can't be appreciated
until you're really far away and they come up
as points of reference.

I don't know what Nebraska looks like.
I've never been. When I say Nebraska
I mean the idea of, the way an ex-girlfriend of mine
once talked about the idea of a gun. But guns are not ideas.
They are not things to which comparisons are made. They are

one weight in my hand when the little boy crests the green hill
and the possibilities of shooting him or not extend out from me
like the spokes of a wheel. The hills are not green anymore
and in my mind they never were, though when I say they were
I mean I'm talking about reality. I appreciate that too,

knowing
the hills were green,
knowing
someone else has paid him
for his scavenging, one less

exploding thing beneath our feet.
I appreciate the fact
that for at least one day I don't have to decide
between dying and shooting a little boy

Blue Star Mother

Kevin Powers

Forward Book of Poetry 2015 p. 37

Compare my sins to this, for instance,
my mother refusing to have her picture taken,
always raising up her hands the moment that
the shutter clicks, so that looking back
on the photographic
evidence of my life
one could be easily convinced
I was raised by a woman
whose face was the palm of a hand.

This is not the case. I know that
in the seventies she wore
large glasses, apparently sat often enough
on cheap imitation teak couches
to be photographed on them more than once, sometimes
had her hair done up
in whatever fashion
wives of factory workers
wore in Richmond
and was beautiful.

But after hanging her blue star up she covered it
with curtains. She stopped
going to the hairdresser
and took up gardening instead.
Which is to say that when she woke up
in the middle of the night
she'd stand in the yard in her nightgown
staring at a clump of dead azaleas
running down beside the house.
Later, she stopped sleeping.
Later still, her hair went grey

I had a picture of her
in my helmet, shuffled in
with other pictures.
I think it was in between
some cutouts from a Maxim magazine and
a Polaroid of my girlfriend's tits
with a note on it that said,
Sorry, last one, be safe, XOXO.

My mother told me
about a dream she had
before the sleeping stopped. I died
and woke her at her bedside
to tell her I was dead,
though I would not have
had to tell her because
I'd already bled on her favorite floral rug
and half my jaw was missing.
I don't know what to make of that.

I like to think she caught
some other mother's dream,
because she could take
how hard the waiting was,
and had all that practice
getting up her hands.

Kevin Powers

The Responses

Eyen

Michael Egbe, 18

The way you looked at me with those round misty eyes, and your wide nose and your bright pink lips.

How you stood with your size 3 feet supporting a 5 foot 5 stature.

When Mum left I would wake up every morning crying to the little picture I had of her, and you would take it away from me and hold me close to say

Don't worry, she's out there for you.

You were God sent, a pure loving soul with no hate in your heart.

You never asked for anything. You sacrificed your own education because your father couldn't afford to send two girls to school, and chose my mother.

But you would have been bright.

When you dressed me in my uniform you would whisper in my ear: Eyen comyen abas ice nfo: Child, I thank God for you.

Jesus

Michael Egbe, 18

I always wanted to be tall. I always feared I would be made fun of, for my little stature. I never got to play Joseph in the Christmas play. I couldn't even be Mary, though I was ready to dress as girl and look pretty. The teacher said, 'Andrew is best for that, not you.'

Not you, not you. That echoed in my head. I could taste the salt of my tears. I envied all the children in the room. All I wanted to do was take a nap and dream of a world where I was Andrew. I crawled into the straw.

'You', shouted my teacher, 'could play Jesus. Michael, you could. You fit in the crib just fine.' So in this photo here I am with my legs crossed my hand behind my head, staring at the stage lights and hearing the laughter I brought to the lovely season that is Christmas.

Family Photo

Teri-Anne Chambers, 17

The small photo that rests on the end table in the hallway
The photo of the warm beach with the family in the sun
The endless blue ocean climbing up the sand.
The family, all smiling, cousins, uncles, grandmas –
Everyone together.
Just that one girl, shy of photos, afraid of cameras,
Is hiding.
She did not care for the photo.
She just wanted to swim under the seas.

Years later now, the family is on holiday.
All there on a small island with endless beaches-
The place where the giant slide is – the place
Of the sweet mangoes and the not so sweet sun, never
Ending. The place of the coconuts that are unbreakable,
Where the fruit punch lives, always the same.
The shy girl is still there
Hiding in the shadows of the blue.

Photo

Chad Majumbar, 17

Small,
Filled with a large amount of memories
Secured within a large database. Each pixel
Moving, one by one
Generating one image
In an album.

Small,
A young boy,
With eyes as big as the moon.
Arms reaching out
After waking up from peaceful dreams
With a sense of satisfaction.

Joy slowly spreading
One action bringing the two together
A hug
A bond which is hard to separate
A smile now present
The young boy filled with life.

The Reading Group
was a brilliant example
of student-led learning
and it has been
heartening to see the
older students working
so well with the
younger years.

Sue Croft, Headteacher

Creative Writing A Level

Oxford Spires has been teaching the new AQA Creative Writing A Level for the last two years. The Forward process of reading and responding to poems is a natural partner for this course, which emphasises the importance of reading to writing.

Three students included poems from *The Forward Book of Poetry 2015* as part of their AS Coursework.

At A2, one student, Kate Mayo, unexpectedly decided to choose poetry as the genre for her final coursework portfolio, and used what she called 'The Yellow Book' as her source text, writing in her own time inspired by the Forward anthology.

When she came to write her commentary, she was able to return to the book to remind her of her process, and give substance to her thoughts.

I first started writing poetry with the literary charity First Story about two years ago. Before that, I never felt as though I had enough confidence to write it – especially not to read my work aloud. However, since joining First Story, I have realised that I do like to read and write poetry.

Kate Mayo, 18

The Best Poem Ever Written

Graham Clifford

Forward Book of Poetry 2015 p. 75

I write a poem that is the best. Massive.
Not just long, but huge intellectually
and although it is book length
reading is like freefalling,
each line greased with two genius thoughts.

The poem makes me famous.
I wander oxygen-depleted nights
down city streets and hear
lines of my poem bartered
between sticky lovers.

On the train, I peek over the top
of a hardback book about me
at a man in a suit nodding off
and recognise the words he's mouthing in his swoon.

All front pages, every day,
showcase stanzas of my poem -
bombings and murders get tucked inside.
The new novelist pays well
to get my poem printed as an introduction:
she knows her work makes no sense without it.

Everyone I have ever known
rings me to ask how I did it.
I say I don't know, and that's the truth.
After a year the fuss hasn't died away.

I sit at my computer
and hear next door turn the TV on.
I put my ear to the wall.
It's an actor and he's reading my poem.
It's a good version: I've heard it before.

He has a Shakespearean voice
doing justice to what the introducer called
The Best Poem Ever Written.
I listen to it all, I travel where the poem takes me then
get back in my chair
and write a better one.

Creative Writing A Level

The Response

My Poem

Kate Mayo, Year 13

I write a poem which is my brain in words.
It's G-Dragon, it's thinking about
cutting my hair really short and dying it
pink or blue before I end up in a job
that I hate.
I spot my black and green
top and now it's Loki
and wishing that my hair was longer
and that I lived in the Marvel version of Asgard.
It's living in the Shire and not
being too tall and not feeling self-conscious.
The poem is my tattoo
and thinking "maybe I should get another one"
but now a breeze comes through The Window That Never Closes
and I have to put a big cardigan on.

And I've lost my train of thought
and so I put my head onto the poetry book in front of me
and wonder if I'm doing this right. All this poetry stuff, I mean.
What even is a poem?
Did Wilfred Owen ever get writer's block?
Now I feel bad for comparing myself to a soldier
and I'm wishing that I was on holiday
in some place that takes a lot of effort
to get to. Somewhere that I'd have to learn
another language for. Like Italian or Korean or Spanish or Japanese.
Why can't I make like Bilbo Baggins and go on an adventure?
I guess
I could but I just don't because I'm too afraid.
And I guess I write poems about stuff that I happen to be thinking
about because for me, they are mini
adventures in themselves.

This poem was inspired by ‘The Best Poem Ever Written’ by Graham Clifford which I found when reading *The Forward Book of Poetry*. I liked that Clifford seemed to go on a tangent with his writing which, in turn, makes his poem sound more and more famous and exciting as it develops. It made me want to write a poem based on wherever my train of thought took me.

I like to write poetry which is ironic; usually when people think of poetry, they think of the classics like Keats or Shelley but my use of language is simple because I want my work to have a contemporary, colloquial speaking voice as if I am saying the lines myself. I do not use poetic diction like other, more classic poets and when I write about Wilfred Owen, I realise that mine and his works are very different and so I used irony to help state the fact that I am not like him. “Did Wilfred Owen ever get writer’s block?” highlights the fact that even though my poetry is completely different from his, I am still a poet and suffer frequently with writer’s block just like anyone else.

Straight away, I mention G-Dragon – a South Korean singer. I was aware that a lot of more classic poems have mythical elements to them; ancient Greek figures are mentioned frequently. I wanted to give ‘My Poem’ my own modern twist to this and so

I included contemporary references to singers and films that I like e.g. Asgard and The Shire. Also, to continue writing about more contemporary ideas, I wrote about tattoos and unconventional hair dye colours – things that would almost certainly not have been mentioned by classic poets.

I do not give my poems much formal structure but I frequently use enjambment. For example, “for me, they are mini / adventures in themselves”. I wanted to do this so that the word “mini” was juxtaposed with the big white space on the page and then “adventures in themselves” has a line of its own to make it sound assertive. I ended ‘My Poem’ on this note as although I am aware of these highly-thought-of poets, I realise that my work is very different to that of theirs. However, I wanted to put my point across that in spite of this, I still want and like to write poetry.

I decided to place ‘My Poem’ at the beginning of my pamphlet so that I could set a tone for the rest of my work; the structure of this poem is typical of most of my other poetry and also, I often write about contemporary things in a way that sounds like I assume the reader already knows what it is.

Kate Mayo, Year 13

Year 7

Graham Clifford's 'The Best Poem Ever Written' was chosen by the Reading Group to be explored with Year 7. Kate Clanchy and teaching assistant Ricky Kiggins worked with this Set 2 class once a week for a term. The students loved the poem and produced some wonderful and very varied responses. It was very difficult to decide which poems to include as they were all so good.

"Some of the quieter students' personalities shone through. Some of the boys who are known for being a little 'loud' become increasingly quiet due to their commitment to writing an exciting piece.

The students benefitted hugely. Some have undertaken further poetry sessions, others still talk about the days that engulfed their imagination and they were all shown that whatever they felt or thought had a way to be written down for others to enjoy."

Every Thursday period 4 was a snippet of wonder where the students were encouraged to explore a variety of emotions. For me, the best part was seeing the smile on a student's face when the other students were applauding their excellent work.'

Ricky Kiggins, teaching assistant

The poetry lessons were good because they made me more interested in poetry and I started to go to the creative writing club First Story. I feel I did benefit from the poetry classes because before I thought poetry was boring but then I found out it was more interesting and that there was lots of different types of poems and that they didn't have to rhyme to sound good. My favourite moment was when we got to write a poem about where we came from - it was one of my best poems.

Year 7 student

I felt the lessons were good because we learned more about poetry than we had known before. The experience benefited me a lot by widening my vocabulary and strengthening my poetic abilities. One of my favourite moments was when I finished my poem.

Year 7 student

The poetry lessons were good because they released our imagination, and taught us how to think like a real poet. We looked at different types of poems, and copied their style, so in future we knew how to structure poems.

Year 7 student

Year 7

Lesson Planning Sheet

Date:	Period:
Teacher:	
Subject:	
Class:	Room:
No. on roll:	
No. girls:	No. boys:
No. SEN:	
No. EAN:	
No. G&T:	

Learning Objectives / Outcomes

RAF3:
To deduce, infer or interpret information from texts

WAFI:
To write thoughtful, imaginative and interesting texts

By the end of the lesson all students will have read and explored a poem and then used it as inspiration to write their own response

Resources

Copies of *The Forward Book of Poetry* or 'The Best Poem Ever Written' by Graham Clifford

Plan	Timing (minutes)	Notes
<p>Starter / Settler Put questions on the board for students to discuss e.g Who is the greatest footballer ever? Who is the greatest singer ever? Who is the greatest influence in history ever?</p>	5	+ Students to discuss with partner
<p>Main Body Read and explore the ideas in the poem and discuss and then feedback</p>	15	
<p>Development Explain to students that they are going to write their own version of 'The Best Poem Ever Written.' Students to use the back of their books to write down answers to questions</p> <p>If your poem was/ awhat kind ofwould it be? (form of transport, weather, food , animal, country etc to get students thinking about what they are going to write. Get them to begin their writing with My poem is.....</p> <p>Give students time to decide what they are going to write about and then get them to start drafting their poems using the original to help them with structure</p>	10	+ Whole class reading and then discussion in groups
<p>Plenary Get students to share their work</p>	20	+ It is often much more productive to get them to work in silence during all or some of the writing process
	10	

Year 7

The Responses

This Verse

Rafi Pollock Joyce, 11

This verse is toxic
If you touch it you will die.
If you read this with intellect it will inflict a nasty bite.
If you read this poem with thought and emotion then you
will eventually
become immune to the toxicity of each verse.

This
Verse
Is
Falling if you read it you will fall
in time with this verse.
This verse in an ocean. If you read it you will get
incredibly wet. You will taste the salt and move
with the rhythm of the waves.

This verse is a hot country.
If you read **it you will get really, really hot.**

This verse **is your** warm comfy bed. If you read it
your eyelids will get heavy and you will fall
asleep.

This verse is a shrink ray
when you read it the words will get smaller
and smaller and
smaller.

Trapped...

Sara Al-Dahwani, 11

My poem is the sound of a terrified scream
At midnight
Almost everyone is asleep
As time goes by
The scream is gone
But it's stuck in your mind

My Poem is the infinite darkness of a dream
A nightmare
Gloomy shadows
Creepy sounds
My poem is chasing you
Using your deepest, darkest fears

My poem is the dark picture on the wall
With its rough, gloomy paint
People, creatures, staring at you with widened eyes
They're watching you
You can run
But you can't hide

That's right
My poem is your deepest darkest fear
Your phobia
You can't escape
That's right
You're TRAPPED!

Wild Poem

Maddie Wolf, 11

Warning:

This is a wild poem.
A wild poem is always cunning
With an evil ink heart
Making a snarling snapping growl
It lives to kill
But the only thing
To do with a poem like this one
Is to set it free
And play music to it
Wild poems love music
It could bite the reader
If the reader annoyed it
But it will never bite its creator
It always creates a bond.
They always share
One thing in common

Have you tried this poem?

Joseph Araujo, 12

This poem tastes like an exotic fruit,
It smells like a field full of blossomed flowers.
It is the by-product of a hundred sugar cubes
Melted and moulded into a paragon sphere.

This poem sounds like an eagle,
An ear-shattering screech which is deadly
To some but a melody to others,
It hurries through your ears and enlightens your brain.

This poem is a cuddly bear,
It feels like heaven descended on the reader's hands,
But it should be handled with care
It is dangerous to those who are not aware of the emotions.

My poem is a forest,
It has a constant relaxing breeze
And it is signposted in your head,
Only able to be accessed by those who believe.

My poem is a school,
It rewards you with wisdom after a long day of reading,
It will never let you go until the chapter is finished,
But you don't want to go, you never do.

I felt it was a good set of lessons because we were all able to let our imaginations flow and just be ourselves. I did benefit from it as I have a lot of imagination and lots of new words to find/let go of. My favourite moment of this was the start as I had a lot of new words to inspire me. The poem that I wrote that inspired me the most was 'My Bucket List' as it says everything that I have or have wanted to do for the past couple of years.

Year 7 student

Year 8

Kate Clanchy worked with this Year 8 Class over a term to produce responses to a poem chosen by the Reading Group. Kei Miller's 'In Which the Cartographer Asks for Directions' was immediately popular with the Reading Group, many of whom have another language at home. They picked it as being likely to work with Year 8 and were right: it worked brilliantly, giving EAL students a chance to think and write about home. Holly, aged 14, is of Jamaican heritage and a member of the Reading Group: she gave a great reading of this in patois to the younger students, and later wrote her own version too – choosing this time to avoid patois.

In Which the Cartographer Asks for Directions

Kei Miller

Forward Book of Poetry 2015, p.17

Sometimes the cartographer gets frustrated when he asks an I-formant how to get to such and such a place, and the I-formant might say something like -

Awrite, you know the big white house at the bottom of Clover Hill with all the windows dem board up, and with a high shingle roof that look almost like a church?

Yes, the cartographer says.

And in front the house you always see a ole woman, only three teeth in her mouth, and she out there selling pepper shrimp in a school chair with a umbrella tie to it. And beside her she always have two mongrel dog and one of them is white and the nedda one is brown?

Yes, I know exactly where you mean, the cartographer says.

And in the yard there is a big guinnep tree that hang right out to the road, so school pickney always stop there to buy shrimp and eat free guinnep?

Yes, yes, the cartographer insists. I know it.

Good, says the I-formant. Cause you mustn' go there.

Year 8 Lesson Planning Sheet

Date:	Period:
Teacher:	
Subject:	
Class:	Room:
No. on roll:	
No. girls:	No. boys:
No. SEN:	
No. EAN:	
No. G&T:	

Learning Objectives / Outcomes

RAF3:
To deduce, infer or interpret information from texts

WAF1:
To write thoughtful, imaginative and interesting texts

By the end of the lesson all students will have read and explored a poem and then used it as inspiration to write their own response

Resources
Copies of *The Forward Book of Poetry* or the poem 'In Which the Cartographer Asks for Directions' by Kei Millar

Plan	Timing (minutes)	Notes
<p>Starter / Settler Write 'You know.....' on the board and get students to instigate conversations (serious or silly) in pairs beginning with - you know Give some examples. Get them to keep the conversation going and then swap</p>	5	+ Students to discuss with partner
<p>Main Body Read and explore the ideas in the poem and discuss and then feedback</p>	15	
<p>Development Explain to students that they are going to write their own version of 'In Which the Cartographer asks for Directions'.</p> <p>Get them to describe directions to their home using different landmarks and to discuss what home means to them – feedback</p> <p>Give students time to decide what they are going to write about and then get them to start drafting their poems using the original to help them with structure</p>	10	+ Whole class reading and then discussion in groups
	5	+ Pair work
	15	+ It is often much more productive to get them to work in silence during all or some of the writing process
<p>Plenary Get students to share their work</p>	10	

Year 8

The Responses

Columbian Conversation

Aisha Borja, 12

Okay, so you know the big mango tree that never go ripe and under that tree, there is an old house where people say a hundred children live?

Uh-huh?

Well, you know that little dog, tied to a gate who never stops barking till the sun go down?

Uh-huh?

Well, you know that smell you get when your eyes start to water and you start to drool –

Yeah, I know that smell –

Well, if you follow that smell, right up that garden path where the star fruit grow and the crickets hum -

Yeah, I think I know that place –

Well, when you see that house with the white paint peeling and when you open that stiff old door -

Uh-huh? Uh-huh?

When you open that door, and you are rugby tackled to the floor with hugs and your cheeks are red with pinching -

Uh- huh?

That's home.

The small plain house

Izzy Franklin, 12

Ok, you know the small plain house at the bottom of the hill with the big green bush that you can't look over. With all the small birds living in it?

“Yes”

And in front of the house you can always hear the scream of the neighbours. And the creaky green gate and that horrible path that will hurt your feet if you walk on it barefoot?

“Yes I know where you mean”

And the constant smell of takeaways with all the loud music and the sound of children laughing and dancing and where the two cats sit on the wall attempting to scare you?

“Yes, yes I know exactly where you mean”

Good. Now stay away, because that is my house

The hanging rope

laesha Jennings, 12

Do you know the way to Hackleberry road?

You know the haunted seven story house?
Behind the toxic white grocery store,
In the middle of the concrete path?

Possibly.

And at the side of that house,
You always see the man twitching and talking to himself,
One blue eye one green.
Then that smell of washing powder mixed with burnt fries
And stale bread?
Where all the kids go after school,
And then run away once they see the barking dog
Foaming at the mouth?

Yes, yes get on with it!

And in the front garden there's that rope
Hanging from the rotting pear tree; been there for years.
That stop sign hanging out of the dining room window.
Cat claw marks on the wall?

I...I don't want to go there anymore.Thanks though

Good - you're not welcome there, anyway.



Year 10 & 11 & more

Because of constraints imposed by GCSE timetables and examinations, it was not possible to have regular Year 10 or 11 groups as such, but teachers used Brendan Cleary's 'It's Our Dance' as practice for the 'unseen poem' section of the GCSE English Literature exam and got students to write responses.

The Reading Group also chose this poem as the most likely to be loved across the school. They liked the simple language, the ampersands, and lack of punctuation which made it immediately accessible to all students, but particularly to lower ability and EAL students who could easily use it to achieve poetry writing success. Students from Year 8 upwards responded in various ways including a rap. Some responses were light-hearted and others much more serious including one response that explored the very topical issue of 'cutting.'

It's Our Dance

Brendan Cleary

Forward Book of Poetry 2015 p. 74

for Lorna

Every Sunday

I play Nina Simone's

'My baby just cares for me'

& with a different flower

in your hair every week

you spring out from the bar

& I leave the mixing desk

& we dance with our hangovers,

yes we dance around the bar

& last week we ended up

outside briefly on Lewes Road

in the petrol hazes

& we even waltzed

out to the beer garden

& everybody smiles

when we dance together

to 'My baby just cares for me'

& for a few precious minutes

it's as if we have all swallowed the moon

& everyone is lighter

& the world might not ever end.

Year 10 & 11 & more

The Responses

Elsewhere

William Cheetham, 16

Every sunset
I watch quiet stars
my cheeks are cold red
& I don't feel so alone
in the windows glazed with ice
I smile our smile
for we miss each other.
Outside I sit happy
with stars in silent
companionship
& within my pockets are
little bits of you
& outside on my mind
and lips
& with these silly memories
I sit
when I think of when
or where or
who to think of someone else
& cherish what I feel
It's not like I don't
understand
& I feel what you feel
& the stars sit with me.

My apology

Mackenzie Silverstone, 15

Every single thought is the same
My self destruction
& tremendous anxiety
through my tears
you come closer
& your eyes are red
& I feel sorry
yes I know that it is bad
& yes I know
I shouldn't
outside is dangerous
not where
I want to be
in the walls of this house
I want to stay
& the same thoughts
continue
out of breath
out of hope
& the shine blinding me
when I turn round
to walk over to my drawers
& pick up the blade
its like I've found peace
& now I'm safe
& now I'm home
& now I'm sorry

The Sea

Aisha Borja, 12

Every night
when I see the moon
& my arms has goose bumps
& my hair rises as if in electric shock
in the night
& you are there
& I am cold
& so are you
yes in the night
& we sit by the sea
& we laugh
& chat in the dark
by the sea outside
we laugh and chat
& moon is bright
out there
& we watch the waves
come in when the boats
are out and we sing
to the moon
& we laugh and chat
& it's cold
but the sand doesn't care
& we do.

Mission:

Frances Thompson, 11

Every night at ten o'clock
I creep downstairs
My mum is watching The Great British Bake Off
& I open the fridge
In the middle of a group of tuppawares
You sit and laugh at me
& I ask you why you laugh at me
& you tell me my mum is behind me
Yes she is
& I am sent to bed again
Outside the window the moon shines
In the midnight sky
& then I creep downstairs again because I never give up
Out of the fridge I take you
& you are still laughing at me
When my mum is nowhere in sight
To my bedroom I carry you
& the taste you put on my tongue is delightful,
It's creamy
& strong
Oh cheese.

One teacher gave her Year 11 class selected poems to analyse and respond to for general exam practice and for homework. Some of the students in this class also entered the Forward Young Responses Competition where they were asked to respond creatively to poems from *The Forward Book of Poetry 2015* and the group chose 'It's Our Dance'. This produced some interesting entries such as visual collage interpretations, Hungarian and Portuguese translations and a rap.

I translated the poem into Hungarian which helped make the meaning deeper for me. Some words would not translate exactly which was at times a bit challenging, but as I want to be a translator when I am older, I found it a very interesting experience.

Year 11 student

Rap Response to 'It's Our Dance'

Abdullah Yusuf, 15

I was wondering...

Are you always this attentive with your Sunday evenings?

Because whenever we speak you don't talk about anything

Is it the alcohol that brings out your childhood?

Or the anonymous lover that you claimed was no good

I always knew Nina Simone brought the passion out of you

Yet I still doubted that the noise complaints from yesterday were actually true

I constantly tell you not to drink and drive

But dancing down the street is an evident surprise

Drinking alcohol can enhance your senses

Your mind goes blank and your heart self-cleanses

As the doors of emotions begin to open

Your morals and principles have been outspoken

By the hearts needs and the voices within

Now the timeless hours have grown to be thin

Now your body is weak and the night is expired

Another heartfelt day is yet to be acquired

Forward Young Responses

Several of the older students really enjoyed shaping their work to enter for the Forward Young Responses Competition. The student who put the most into this was Shukria Rezaei, and we were all delighted when she won in her category. Shukria explains:

I am a sixth form student at Oxford Spires Academy but I was educated until I was 14 in Afghanistan and Pakistan. When I came here it was a big shock to me: I want to be an A student, but because of my English I get Bs and Cs. I am from the Hazara people in Afghanistan. Poems are very important to my people. I love to read and write poetry. I especially liked the Kevin Powers poems because of the way he wrote about war. My poems are also about war, and leaving my country. I always want to write about my heritage, even though it makes me shy. Winning the Forward Young Response Competition made me very proud. Now I will take AS Creative Writing next year and I believe I can get an A.

Shukria Rezaei, 17

Journey: a Sequence of Poems

Shukria Rezaei, 17

My Hazara People

I can't write about my Hazara people
Who have suffered for decades
In Afghanistan where they come from
In Pakistan where they are murdered
In Iran where they offend because of their almond shaped eyes
My mind is blank!

I can't write about how loud the shooting was
Just two miles away from my house
How my aunt fainted
How nervous my mom got
how the cup fell from her hand

I can't write about how innocent people died
how the Martyr's necropolis gets bigger and bigger
how my people suffer
how cruel this world can get
how frightening it is

for kids like me.

Where are you going?

Riding your half-alive donkey
In a hot desert.
Owls, thirsty, hungry,
mob you for food and water.

But you are bare-footed
With a back pack with barely
Any food in it.
Warm water bottle in hand.

Migration
Smells bitter.
Tastes sour.
hard to swallow.

Photo

It's a black and white photo
of my Dad when he was younger.
He is wearing geek glasses
like a Uni student.

It's passport size with folded edges,
like it's from centuries and
centuries ago. It's fading away
from black to grey.

The edges are sepia.
The paper is soft and fraying
and in the back
it says 1975.

He is young.
He is hopeful.
He sees his life
ahead of him.

Since then
he has gone through war,
emigration, but he has learned,
and he is strong now.

His eyes are still the same.
Black almond eyes.
It's only a head shot.

You know

You know, the traffic light in the middle of the Cowley Road, with a old man sitting on a white chair, smoking and staring? And in front of it is a bus stop with long queues and impatient people, and the road is thin and long with two different names, Oxford Road and Cowley Road, and busy cars and bicycles and buses going past?

This is not home.

You know the high rocky mountains with a jagged road, and the mud houses down the valley with sheep, goats, chickens and cows in their stables all lowing and waiting to be fed? And in front of the house is a woman chopping up grass so fresh that the smell clings to your nose as you pass by? And when you enter the house that smells of peace and love and you are heartily welcomed and invited to tea and borsagh, and kishmish nakhut –

This is my home -

I shall go back.

I shall put my suitcase full of gifts.
I have promised, down on the floor.
The gifts I have been waiting for.
I shall see their smiles.

I shall hang the nails from my neck
That my cousins, uncles, and Aunties,
Have put around my neck at the airport,
On the nail.

I shall sit down for the dinner,
With family.
And smell the smell of Quadid
That nourishes you just by its smell.
I shall sleep outside,
In the hot summer nights
And feel the soft winds nourishing me.
And I shall never
Wake up with fear of war.

I shall hear my mum swooshing the carpet-sweeper
Early in the morning.
I shall see her saying: Wake- up guests
Are coming. The house needs to be tidy.

I shall feel at home, once again.

Me

I am Shukria,
which means, thank you.

I know what is in my head.
I know I am rubbish at Biology,
but I know why a leaf is green.

I know why the sky is blue
(I love Physics)
I know water is not blue.

I know why people are never at peace.
I know why they go to war.
I know why the nest has fallen apart.

I know why birds migrate.
I have been a migrant; a plane;
a boat; a hammer in the hand;

An angry bird in a game.
I have been a pen in the hand
A line on paper.

I have been through war
For months and months
I have been injured, but I am alive.

I am Shukria
Which means, thank you.



Taking a Teacher's Writing into the Classroom

As teachers, we are very good at getting students to write poetry and to analyse all things poetic, but how many of us actually sit down ourselves and join in with the writing process?

Although I have 'dabbled' with writing in the past, I would in no way call myself a writer. The students I took on the Arvon Course - enabled by First Story - were not just writers, but writers of the best calibre. These students write every day, don't feel connected to the world if they don't and look for inspiration in everything.

I felt humbled by the ease with which they continually produced creative works of the highest quality and the confidence they showed in sharing their writing. I on the other hand found the process quite challenging and very emotional at times. I now know firsthand how it feels to be in a classroom and not know what to write or feel that your work isn't good enough.

However, I am pleased to report that I did manage to put pen to paper and took the leap of faith to share some of my work with family and friends as well as using one of my poems in a lesson with my Year 11 class.

Linda Woodley, English Teacher
Oxford Spires Academy

Comb

Linda Woodley

Daddy bought you this comb
on one of his weekends.
Why do we continue to involuntarily call him daddy?
Are we both still immovably bound to the
moment he left our house?

Is it because his sapling daddiness
never became the strong Oak Dad you deserved?

He saved that for his other seeds.

Now the seven year old Sunday night you.
Shower, book bag, bunches, cane row plaits,
Coconut oil, Sta Sof Ro, partings and pain
combing your hair again and again
until it shines polished black and proud.

You tell me about your daddy time.

I sit behind you and cry soundless mum tears for your loss.

Year 11

Lesson Planning Sheet

Date:	Period:
Teacher:	
Subject:	
Class:	Room:
No. on roll:	
No. girls:	No. boys:
No. SEN:	
No. EAN:	
No. G&T:	

Learning Objectives / Outcomes

To analyse how poets use language, structure and form to convey meaning and consciously think about these factors in your own writing

By the end of the lesson all students will have read and explored a poem and then used it as inspiration to write their own response

Resources

Copies of 'Comb' or one of your own poems that you have written – If you are using one of your poems then don't reveal to the students that it is yours until the middle of the lesson

Plan	Timing (minutes)	Notes
<p>Starter / Settler Think of an object that is meaningful / important to you. What memories does it hold for you?</p>	5	+ Students to discuss with partner
<p>Main Body Read and explore the ideas in the poem and discuss and then feedback</p>	15	+ Whole class reading and then discussion in groups
<p>Development How has the poet used language, structure and form to convey her ideas?</p> <p>Explain to students that they are going to write their own version of the poem (If you are using your own poem, then you can now tell the students.)</p> <p>Give students time to decide what they are going to write about and how they are going to use form, language and structure to convey what they want to say. Get them to start writing drafts of their own poems</p>	5	+ You could differentiate here and get different groups to discuss different features
<p>Plenary Get students to share their work</p>	25	+ It is often much more productive to get them to work in silence during all or some of the writing process
	10	

We explored my poem but I didn't tell the students I had written it. It was very strange to hear them analysing my work and discussing the way the 'poet' had used language, structure and form. I then asked them to think of an object that held a special meaning for them and to use 'Comb' as inspiration to write their own responses. Before they began the writing process, I revealed that I had written the poem and after their shock, they settled down to write some lovely responses.

Linda Woodley, teacher

The Forward Book journeys into the Pitt Rivers Museum

First Story also arranged a trip to Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford with four local schools where the students used the artefacts on display, and the poem 'Puppets' by David Tait (*The Forward Book of Poetry 2015*, p 143) as inspiration for writing poems. Here is a response by James Lambeth from The Oxford Academy.

Totem Pole

James Lambeth, 14

I will make
my pole
from
recycled plastic.
You have to
be wasteful
to reduce waste.
It will be
carved
with faces
of pets, faces of drinks
bottles and
faces of old
pens. On top
of this pole will
be unusual
symbols, symbols
of untold and undiscovered
places.
I will store this pole somewhere
out of reach, and hidden
under a tall cloak.
Inside this totem pole is
untold riches, stories
of the past. The future
is bright.



Kate Clanchy and students take the poems to the Pitt Rivers Museum

What was learned...

...as a whole school

The collaboration has been a great success for the school as a whole. We have had so many students engaged with and enjoying reading and writing poetry. The Reading Group was a brilliant example of student led learning and it has been heartening to see the older students working so well with the younger years.

The quality and range of work produced by the students from Year 13 all the way down to Year 7 over the last year has been quite simply staggering.

It has been a great way to prepare students in year 7 and 8 to move forward in readiness for the challenges of studying poetry in the higher years with the knowledge that they can read and understand the complex ideas in contemporary poetry and are also successful writers.

Many of the students involved in the classes went on to join the First Story Writing Group. It was also great to see how *The Forward Book of Poetry* could be used to feed into A Level coursework at the upper end of the school.

Sue Croft, Headteacher

...as an English Department

This collaboration has made the department feel more confident and creative in terms of its poetry teaching.

The sessions with Kate Clanchy have made it possible to integrate poetry and creativity into 'normal lessons' and it was wonderful to see the students so enthusiastic and engaged in reading and writing poetry.

The department also learned that even with the constraints of GCSE and A - Levels, space and time can be found for creativity and that giving students the opportunity to write their own poems is beneficial in helping them when they come to analyse other writers' works.

The department has also followed one of the suggestions from the Manifesto for Poetry and have students' poems displayed in large frames on the English floor.

...as a teacher

I have been teaching for eight years and this year was the first time I felt brave enough to use my own writing with one of my classes. It seems an obvious but somewhat overlooked thing to do. I don't feel I would have considered doing this had I not spent a week on the First Story Arvon Course or sat in on some Kate Clanchy's lessons.

I feel the fact that I shared some of my writing with my students has helped them with their own writing as the boundaries between what makes a writer a writer or a poet a poet shifted somewhat.

Writing poetry (which I continue to do) has also helped me in terms of my own teaching of poetry analysis. I feel my confidence has grown and I can help students explore more deeply how form, structure and language are used by poets to convey meaning. I hope for my students that seeing my attempt at writing and also having the opportunity to write poems themselves has taken away some of the fear and mystery that often surrounds the study of poetry and that they too will continue to write.

Linda Woodley, English Teacher

I hope for my students that seeing my attempt at writing and also having the opportunity to write poems themselves has taken away some of the fear and mystery that often surrounds the study of poetry and that they too will continue to write.

Forward Arts Foundation

Forward Arts Foundation was created in 1991 by entrepreneur and publisher William Sieghart. A poetry-lover, he wanted to read an anthology containing the best poetry of the year. Since none existed, he published one himself.

The contents of the first book, which came out in 1992, were chosen by five judges including Sir Stephen Spender, Margaret Drabble and Roger McGough. The 1992 Prizes were a success: they became an annual event. The Forward Prizes and book attracted both people who did not know where to begin with poetry and hardened poetry readers and its power to make reputations was compared to that of the Booker Prize.

In 1994, Sieghart founded National Poetry Day, a day of mass celebration of all things poetical which was taken up enthusiastically by schools, factories, offices and even railway stations. The UK's main poetry organisations and most effective advocates

work closely together to make this a success in schools, in the media and across social media. In 2014, the NPD #thinkofapoem twitter campaign reached 110 million people, worldwide. The day marks its 21st anniversary on October 8, 2015.

Forward Arts Foundation has a strong education mission: it believes poetry can be taught successfully in schools if teachers are given more confidence, and that poetry is particularly well suited to encouraging enjoyment of language and literature among students whose attainment is lower than their potential. We also want *The Forward Book of Poetry* to be used more widely in schools, believing contemporary poetry – writing as fresh as news – is a particularly good way of fostering engagement with a new generation and getting students started on a life-long love affair with words.

Forward Arts Foundation is supported by Arts Council England as part of its national portfolio.

Oxford Spires Academy

Oxford Spires Academy serves the multicultural East Oxford area in the University City of Oxford and offers education to a richly diverse mixed cohort of 1,110 students aged 11 to 19. The Academy opened in January 2011.

The school's main specialism is English, chosen because of its importance to every child's growth and achievement.

The headteacher, Sue Croft, describes the school as 'a centre of excellence for reading, oral skills and literacy, enabling students to excel in use of English at all levels including able, gifted and talented students as well as students learning English as a second language.'