

Saltaire Festival Poetry Competition 2020

Session 3 – Children & Young People

This session looks at blank verse, question and answer poems two styles or types of poems you might want to explore if you want to enter a poem into the 2020 competition, the theme of which is Green Aire. You can find full details at www.saltairefestival.co.uk. You'll also find worksheets there that recap the videos and have suggestions for writing activities.

Blank Verse

Blank verse has a 'di-DUM, di-DUM, di-DUM, di-DUM, di-DUM' rhythm or meter. It has 10 syllables with a stress on syllables 2,4,6,8 and 10 – soft stress on 'di' and hard stress on 'DUM'. The rhythm is called iambic pentameter.

Shakespeare uses iambic pentameter a lot in his sonnets. For example:

Shall **I** compare thee to a **summer's day**? Sonnet 18

The Centre for Literature in Primary Education says that we use the iambic pattern in much of every day speech, such as '*Does anybody want a cup of tea?*'¹

Many nursery rhymes use this method, like this old one:

Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker's man.
Bake me a cake as fast as you can,
Pat it and prick it and mark it with B
Put it in the oven for baby and me.

Here's the beginning of *Thinker's Rap* by Eloise Greenfield. Notice the rhythm, which uses 'di-DUM'. Read the full poem: <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/thinkers-rap>

'Walking out the school door,
didn't come to stay,
didn't mean to talk, but
did it anyway.'

1 <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poeticforms/blank-verse>



Saltaire Festival Poetry Competition 2020

Here's a draft poem about the rats and litter I've noticed when I've been out for my exercise. I could explore the good impact (lack of litter, clean streets, animals not eating plastic or getting heads stuck in bottles) and not so good (rats more visible, in houses, causing stress, on rivers/canals):

Walking down a Saltaire street

Nobody around,

The only families

that I meet

do so with a bound.

Scurrying up a garden wall

Hunger in their eye,

No litter left

no tourists,

Rats trying not to die.

I'm breaking up my sentences
into short lines.

Notice how punctuation is used,
where there are no commas,
meaning lines are read with no
stops for a breath.

You can write blank verse that rhymes, as Shakespeare does in his sonnets, or that doesn't rhyme, but does have a rhythm. You can decide if:

- your poem will use all the 42 lines you have or less
- your poem will break into stanzas. Stanzas are blocks of lines that stand together and have space between them.

Question and Answer poems

This is a type of poem that uses dialogue between two people, eg a conversation. It's a style and structure generally used for comic poems, but it can be used also to explore serious issues, such as global warming, extinction of animals, or about who cares for nature.

Nature is explored in this extract from *The Treasures* by Clare Bevan. Notice how the animals answer, the sound that they make, and the use of rhyme.

The full poem is here: (<https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/treasures-clare-bevan>)



Saltaire Festival Poetry Competition 2020

Who will bring me the hush of a feather?

“I,” screeched the Barn Owl. “Whatever the weather.”

Who will bring me the shadows that flow?

“I,” snarled the Tiger. “Wherever I go.”

Who will bring me the colours that shine?

“I,” shrieked the Peacock. “Because they are mine.”

and it ends

But who will care for the treasures we give?

“I,” said the Child.

“For as long as I live.”

Thinking about the Green Aire theme, the pandemic and how people are coping, in this draft, my characters are talking about mental health and nature:

‘I’m stressed and worried, I know you were too,

Please tell me friend, what did you do?’

I went to the river, I walked by the Aire,

I watched the sky and the clouds scud by

Then I laid in the grass to stare.

‘Can staring lessen the stress I feel?’

Can lying in the grass help me to heal?’

I was thinking about *Old Father William* in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland as I wrote it.

- Your Q&A could be people, animals/birds or even one person talking to a mirrored reflection
- It could be a parent and child, grandparent and grand-child
- It might be a Q&A of the future, eg ‘What did you do in the pandemic’ type of poem



Saltaire Festival Poetry Competition 2020

These are another couple of styles you might want to play with before choosing the one you'll use for writing your poem to submit to the 2020 Saltaire Festival Poetry Competition.

I hope you've got something from Sessions 1-3 of these short videos.

Sessions Four and Five are aimed at writers older teenagers and adults - you'll find these on the website.

Remember, the closing date for the competition is 17 July and all details can be found at www.saltairfestival.co.uk

Happy writing! - and good luck!

Irene Lofthouse

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