

Tyger Tyger Magazine

New poems for children



EXPLORING 'ON YOUR MARKS...', BY JAY BRAZEAU

Resource written by Rachel Piercey

Getting to know the poem

Ask the children to sit with their eyes closed and read the poem out loud to them. After you have finished, ask them what they thought and which parts stuck in their minds. There are no wrong answers! Display the poem or hand out individual copies and read it again.

Were there any words which they were surprised to find in a poem? Some listeners may feel that runners, pitchers and bedbugs aren't very 'poetic' – but you can talk about anything in a poem!

A poet's perspective: "Here are some reasons why I love repetition: it sounds good; it makes those words stand out; it creates a pattern; it makes the poem easier to remember; it makes the poem sound a bit like a chant, spell, song or playground game. And I love alliteration because it also sounds good when the poem is read aloud; it connects words together and gives them extra emphasis; and it echoes the structure of Anglo-Saxon poetry, where the lines were woven together using alliteration." – Rachel

"Tyger is an old-fashioned spelling of tiger, most famously used by William Blake in his poem 'The Tyger' (1794). I think the strange spelling adds an enchanted flavour to the word and makes the tiger seem a little bit magical!" – Rachel

Repetition and Alliteration

If it hasn't come up already, draw their attention to the repetition in the poem. Each noun is repeated, as well as the phrase "ready, set". Do they like these repetitions? Why? Why do they think the poet might have used them?

Alliteration is a form of repetition, and because this poem repeats the noun in every second line ("runner, runner", "baker, baker" etc), there is lots of alliteration here. Can they find any other instances?

Changing the Pattern

Poets also like to use repetition because once they've established a pattern, they can have fun changing it! Look together at the poem and pick out where the poet has changed the pattern. ("Burning bright" is the more obvious example, but "dough" also changes the pattern, as it is a noun rather than an adjective.)

What do they feel is the effect of this change in pattern?



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Performing the poem

This poem is ideal for performance! Divide the class into small groups and assign them each a rhyming couplet to prepare for performance. Give them a few minutes to decide how they will perform it and ask them to think about the following choices:

- Will their group read all together or separately?
- Will they use actions?
- How fast or slow will they read the lines?
- How will they use volume and expression?

Individual writing

Having got to know the poem, invite the children to write their own poem, inspired by 'On Your Marks...'. Either individually, or on the board as a class, draft a list of interesting nouns. Jay has mixed up poetry, sport, big and small animals, and professions, so encourage them to use a variety as well. They could also write down nouns associated with plants and trees, geographical features, towns and cities, school, home, hobbies etc.

For each noun, include some possible verbs to go with it (e.g. footballer: kick, tackle, pass, skid, run; river: flow, tumble, rush, slither, shine, sing, whisper). Some rhymes may start to emerge within their lists – or they might need to think up new ones.

Then they can pick the words they think work best to create their poems, using the structure of Jay's lines. Jay has created eight-line stanzas with four words that rhyme, but your poets can choose their own stanza structure. Four-line stanzas with two words that rhyme might be easier to start with.

They should feel free, like Jay does, to change the pattern every so often!

Encourage them to redraft, scribble out and change things – poets almost never get their poem right first time and their notebooks tend to be very messy! When they're ready to write it up neatly, you may like to use the print-out template below. Your poets can either keep Jay's original title or choose their own. But explain to them that if you have written a poem inspired by someone else, it's important to acknowledge them – and the easiest way to do this is with a short line beneath the title (see below).

We would love to see what your pupils come up with! Tag us on Twitter @tygertygermag with a picture, or email us on tygertygermagazine@gmail.com for some personalised feedback.



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after 'On Your Marks...' by Jay Brazeau

by

