



## EXPLORING 'TIGHTROPE WALK TEAM' BY S.J. PERILLO

*Resource written by Rachel Piercey*

### Getting to know the poem

Ask your pupils 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 (see below) or hand out individual copies and read it again.

Are they familiar with any of these creatures? If they don't already know, can they guess what animals a 'cockatoo' and a 'boa' are? Display some images of these amazing creatures.

Why do they think S.J.'s speaker has chosen these animals for the tightrope walk team? Why do they think the speaker asks the Leopard Slug to go last?

### List poems

'Tightrope Walk Team' is a list poem. S.J. has listed the members of a team of tightrope walkers, choosing animals which are skilled at balancing on narrow surfaces such as stems and branches.

In a list poem, the poet writes down several items connected to the theme they have chosen. You can simply name your item ("a tree") or describe it in more detail ("a gnarled oak with rustling leaves"). Write down the title 'Our Classroom' and, as a class, make a quick list of items inside and outside the room. Then, using the five senses, add some details to describe them.

You can also add other lines which are not part of the list. In 'Tightrope Walk Team', S.J. has added an instruction at the end. List poems – like all poetic forms – are there to have fun with!

### Being specific

The poem doesn't just list "ant", "snake", "spider" etc. Instead, S.J. has chosen a particular species for each animal, e.g. "Pharoah ant", "Emerald tree boa". Poets like to be specific with their language, to help us picture exactly what they are describing. Poets also love beautiful and interesting words, like "Fritillary", "Golden Silk", "Umbrella" and "Emerald". As a class, search for different species of each of the animals listed in S.J.'s poem.

Ask your pupils which names they find particularly striking.



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## Group poem

As a class, choose a new team theme for your list poem, e.g. 'Flying Team', 'Tunnelling Team', 'Sprinters', 'Marathon Runners', 'The Scuttlers', 'Crawling Crew', 'Slow Bicycle Race' etc.

Then choose the animals which would be particularly suitable for your team. For each animal, search for different species together and choose the most interesting-sounding names. For example, would you choose the star-nosed mole or the hairy-tailed mole for your tunnelling team?

Will you add any other lines to your list of animals? S.J.'s speaker includes "Me" at the beginning of the poem – could you add your class's name? Will you include an instruction at the end?

## Individual writing

Invite the children to write their own poems, inspired by 'Tightrope Walk Team'. Ask them to each choose a new theme for their team, as above.

Then, rather than using the names of particular species, ask them to describe their animals. What are the specific characteristics of the creatures on their team? How do they move? What do they feel like to touch? What sounds do they make? Here are a few examples:

### *Sprint Team*

Tiger, made of sunshine and shadows  
Horse, with hailstone hooves  
Fierce, feathery peregrine falcon...

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. What will they choose as their title?

Explain 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 underneath 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 'Tightrope Walk Team' by S.J. Perillo*

*by* .....





## TIGHTROPE WALK TEAM

by S.J. Perillo

Me

Pharaoh ant

Queen of Spain Fritillary caterpillar

Golden Silk Orb Weaver spider

Umbrella cockatoo

Ring-tailed lemur

Emerald tree boa

Leopard slug

But

Leopard slug – best you go last

