



Exploring 'King of the Moles' by Gwenno Gwilym

Key topics: Persuasive speech · Repetition · Animals · Individual writing

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Getting to know the poem

Tell your pupils you are going to read them a poem about a mole. Before you start, gather some ideas about moles and what they are like, and write them on the board: e.g. cute, a pest, soft, small, poor eyesight, great diggers, eat earthworms, make molehills... Have they read *The Wind in the Willows*? What is Mole like in these stories? Gwenno Gwilym's poem overturns some of the expectations and assumptions we have around moles, which is part of its surprise and appeal.

Ask your pupils to sit with their eyes closed and read 'King of the Moles' out loud to them. Ask them which parts they liked, and which parts stuck in their minds and why. There are no wrong answers! Then discuss:

- Is Gwenno's Mole King different to the creature they expected to hear about? How so?
- Who is the Mole King speaking to and what does he want them to do?
- What do we call it when something non-human is given human characteristics?

Class performance

Display the poem and go over any vocabulary which may be unfamiliar.

- subterrestrial: underground
- artillery: powerful weapons
- seismic: relating to earthquakes or vibrations of the earth
- polydactyl: having extra fingers or toes (moles have an extra thumb on each paw)

Divide the class into eight groups and give each group a stanza to practise, encouraging them to be creative with pacing, volume and expression. Then perform the poem out loud as a class.

Now that everyone is familiar with the poem, revisit the words on the board describing moles. Which characteristics has Gwenno included? How has she given them an interesting, poetic twist? For example, look at how she portrays the fact of them having soft fur ("lonely velvet warriors"), and eating worms ("worm larders"). Are there characteristics has she left out or changed?



Persuasive speech

The Mole King wants to convince “daylight dwellers” to give his underground world “a chance”. To do so, he uses a range of persuasive devices. Go through the poem with your class and find examples of the following:

- Establishing authority
- Direct address to the reader / listener
- Commands / imperatives
- Facts and specialist language
- Emotive language
- Powerful imagery
- Exaggeration
- Rule of three

Would your pupils like to visit the world of the Mole King?

Repetition and structure

‘The Mole King’ does not rhyme, but it is carefully structured using various forms of repetition. Go through the poem together and note the different forms of repetition, including the repetition of letters, i.e. alliteration.

What do your pupils feel is the effect of all this repetition? Again, there are no wrong answers. Share Gwenno’s thoughts, below:

“I use repetition in my poem ‘King of the Moles’ to create rhythm and structure. I enjoy writing poems with repetition because it gives me a pattern to follow. In this poem the repetition is used at the beginning of each line and I think this gives the poem a steady rhythm. When I read it out loud, the repetition sounds how I imagine the rhythm of the Mole King’s deep, steady voice would sound when he’s trying to entice us all underground.” – Gwenno Gwilym

Repetition is also a powerful persuasive tool. We remember the Mole King’s point because the message has been repeated so many times.

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Class poem

As a class, make a list on the board of animals we do not typically describe as powerful, e.g. ladybirds, rabbits, pandas, sea otters, woodlice, puppies... Choose one together and note down some of its physical characteristics and behaviours:

- What are its distinguishing features?
- What would it feel like to touch?
- How does it move?
- Describe its habitat and environment.
- What special skills does it have?
- What does it make or do?
- What does it eat?
- What sounds does it make?
- How would it address us humans? (The Mole King calls us “daylight dwellers”, in comparison to the darkness-dwelling moles.)

Imagine it is a proud and powerful king or queen addressing an audience of humans, enticing us to visit their unique world and marvel at their impressive abilities, and write a class poem giving voice to your animal ruler. You may choose to follow the structure of ‘The Mole King’ and change some words, as per the guided template below, or you may prefer to use your own phrasing, making sure to include lots of repetition.

Individual writing

Invite the children to write their own poems about an Animal King or Queen of their choice, inspired by ‘The Mole King’. They can follow Gwenno’s structure fully or partially or use their own.

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 blank 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 'King of the Moles' by Gwenno Gwilym

Come all you

Come visit our

Give this lifestyle a chance

I'm the

Ruling my network

Come admire our

Come meet my

Give this world of a chance

I'm the

Ruling my empire of

Come activate your

Come navigate our

Give these a chance

I'm the

Ruling my realm

Come admire our

Come listen to

Give my a chance

Enter this eternal

Learn to

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after 'King of the Moles' by Gwenno Gwilym

by





King of the Moles

by Gwenno Gwilym

Come all you daylight dwellers
Come visit our hidden kingdom
Give this subterrestrial lifestyle a chance

I'm the Mole King
Ruling my underground network

Come admire our worm larders
Come meet my artillery of miners
Give this world of deep darkness a chance

I'm the Low Profile King
Ruling my empire of soil

Come activate your seismic sensors
Come navigate our infinite burrows
Give these diligent dirt diggers a chance

I'm the Seldom Seen King
Ruling my sunken realm

Come admire our polydactyl paws
Come listen to the accelerated sounds
Give my lonely velvet warriors a chance

Enter this eternal blackout
Learn to follow your snout

