



Exploring 'Acoustic Recordings' by Elizabeth Kuelbs

Key topics: Sound · Poetic structure · Word choice · Class poem · Individual writing

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. Ask them which words and images stuck in their minds. There are no wrong answers! Display the poem (see below) or hand out copies and read it again. All the things in Elizabeth's poem really do hum! Were they surprised by any of these facts?

If you'd like to explore further, you can watch an interesting video of tuning forks in action (<https://thekidshouldseethis.com/post/resonance-forced-vibration-and-a-tuning-forks-demonstration>), listen to giraffes humming (<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2058123-giraffes-spend-their-evenings-humming-to-each-other/>), and find out more about the sounds of the mountains (<https://eos.org/articles/mountains-sway-to-the-seismic-song-of-earth>).

Structure and word choice

'Acoustic Recordings' is full of facts. But it's not just a simple list of things that hum! Elizabeth has structured her poem carefully to make it powerful and engaging. Ask your class, can they point out where the poem uses repetition? Its first three stanzas start with the words "_____ things hum". Poets love the number three – there's something very satisfying about it!

Poets also like precise language. They work at finding just the right word for something, so that the reader can picture it vividly, or perhaps think about it in a new way. Where, in their opinion, has Elizabeth used interesting adjectives and verbs to create a vivid picture? Again, there are no wrong answers! But, as an example, I love her use of the words "bustling", "crabapple" and "thrumming". They help me see and hear the busyness of the hive, to picture the sunset colours of the sky, and to sense the low vibrations of the mountains.

Finally, look together at the poem's examples of things that hum. Do they get bigger or smaller over the course of the poem? The first two stanzas are about small things. Then there's a leap in size to humans and giraffes. Then the poem moves on to the grandness of the mountains, before finishing on the vastness of the oceans and the Earth's crust. The increasing scale creates a satisfying pattern and leaves us contemplating the majesty of the world.

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Class poem

As a class, create a list of verbs which apply to lots of different things in the world, both living and non-living, for example: dance, sing, spin, fall, jump, cling, grow, sigh, laugh, wave...

Choose one of these verbs together, and then create a list of things which do it. For example, *dance* could apply to leaves, seeds, feet, hands, flowers, trees, eyes, words, hair, ribbons, bubbles, the wind, ideas, laughter... Quirky and surprising interpretations of the theme are most welcome!

Discuss what dancing thing you would like to end your poem on – what will feel most significant and impactful? Then choose three categories that work with the rest of your dancing things, for example, “Growing things dance”, “Human things dance”, and “Invisible things dance”. You don’t need to include everything on the board – just pick the things that work well together, and add more if needed.

Following the structure of ‘Acoustic Recordings’, write your own new class poem, choosing interesting and surprising verbs and adjectives to go with your examples. Then finish your poem with the significant thing you chose to end on. Are there any final tweaks or edits you want to make before you read the poem aloud together?

Individual writing

Invite the children to write their own poems, inspired by ‘Acoustic Recordings’ and your class poem. They can choose a verb from the board or one they have thought of themselves.

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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New poems for children



after 'Acoustic Recordings' by Elizabeth Kuelbs

by





Acoustic Recordings

Struck things hum.

Tuning forks from hard kneecaps,
crystal bowls from gentle taps.

Winged things hum.

Honeybees to bustling hives,
hummingbirds to crabapple skies.

Moonlit things hum.

Giraffes among their wakeful mates,
composers—though it's growing late.

And we can catch the mountains humming
from their green slopes to summit fogs,
thrumming their old rock songs

of Earth's deep quakes and ocean waves.

by Elizabeth Kuelbs

