



Exploring 'My Mate, Mark' by Helen Dineen

Key topics: Rhyme · Repetition · Friendship · Class poem · Individual writing

Resource written by Rachel Piercey

Getting to know the poem

Display 'My Mate, Mark' (see below) and read it aloud. What was their favourite detail? Did they find any of them familiar from their own friends and family? Did they find some of the details funny? Which was their favourite rhyme? Mine is "goalie" / "ravioli" / "slowly"!

Divide the class into four groups and give them each a verse to perform. They can choose whether to divide up the lines or read them all together. Just ask them to read slowly and clearly and to make sure the rhymes are obvious.

Rhyme and repetition

After the class performance, ask your class, how many lines rhyme in each verse? There are three clear rhyming words in each verse (in verse 1 and 4, "Mark" also half-rhymes with the other lines). Two rhyming lines are more common, generally speaking. It's harder to think of three rhymes than two! But poets think carefully about what form to use for their poems and Helen has decided to go for the challenge of using three rhyming lines.

Why do they think this might be? There are no wrong answers! I think three rhyming lines gives more of a 'list' effect, sounds even better because you get the pleasure of three rhymes, and allows Helen to have lots of creative rhyming fun.

There is a repeated line, too. Ask them to recite it back to you. They should be able to remember it – that's because repetition makes a line striking and memorable! The fourth line is also shorter than the others, which makes it punchy and even easier to remember.

Grammar and punctuation

Ask your class, are these lines perfectly grammatical sentences? No, they're not! Poems give you lots of freedom to be creative with language. Helen has chosen to start each line with key words such as "Good", "Knows" and "Helpful", rather than "Mark is..." or "He...". This is more impactful, draws attention to Mark's unique characteristics, and creates more of a 'list' feel.

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Helen has also used brackets to add information, used unconventional spelling for humour and pacing, and included a question for variety. Identify these with the pupils. They should feel free to be creative and varied with sentence structure in their poems, too!

Class writing

First, warm up your poetic muscles as a class by adding a rhyming line to each of the verses. Here are some rhyming words to get you started. Read them aloud when you've finished.

Verse 1: chart, part, start, apart, depart, apple tart

Verse 2: bop, chop, cop, drop, hop, shop, swap, lollipop, spinning top

Verse 3: holey, shoaly, wholly, guacamole, nucleoli (structures inside the centre of cells!)

Verse 4: bar, car, jar, scar, bizarre, jaguar, au revoir

Individual writing

Invite your pupils to choose someone new to write about, inspired by Helen's poem – it can be a friend or a family member. Ask them to jot down some of this person's favourite things, activities they enjoy doing, reasons they are a good friend, what they'd like to be when they're older, and anything else that comes to mind.

Once they have a list, the challenge is to choose and group these descriptions into rhyming lines. For starters, aim for two verses of four lines, i.e. three rhyming lines plus a refrain using the person's name, as in 'My Mate, Mark'.

Encourage them to be creative with rhyme and sentence structure, and 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 'My Mate, Mark' by Helen Dineen

by





My Mate, Mark

Good at reading, great at art
Knows four poems off by heart
Helpful, kind and super smart
My mate, Mark

Always singing (mostly pop)
Chews his nails (he just can't stop)
Does fantastic bellyflops
My mate, Mark

Great at football (he's our goalie)
Favourite food? It's ravioli!
Chews it veeeery, veeeery slowly...
My mate, Mark

Shares his chocolate, plays guitar
Says he'll be a movie star
My best friend at school by far
My mate, Mark

by Helen Dineen

