



# Tyger Tyger Magazine

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## Poetry reading and writing activity: weeds and wildflowers

A guide to: reading 'Dandelion' by Gita Ralleigh (see poem below), discussing poetic techniques in the poem, a class writing warm-up, and prompts for individual writing.

### Discussing dandelions

The poem looks in detail at the unique beauty of the dandelion and there are some specific facts and potentially unfamiliar words that it will be helpful to cover with your class before you read it.

Firstly, discuss with the class what they know about dandelions. What colour are they? How do they change over the year? Are they a popular plant for gardeners or are they often considered to be a weed? What about bees and other pollinators? You might like to watch the video halfway down this page from the Royal Horticultural Society: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/weeds/dandelion>

Bring up a picture of a dandelion flower and leaves. The English name comes from the French word for dandelion, 'Dentes de leon', which means 'teeth of the lion'. Can they see how the flower got its name? Does anything else about the flower remind them of a lion?

All plants have a common name (what we call them in everyday conversation), and a botanical name used by experts. The botanical name for the dandelion family is 'Taraxacum'. This comes from the Arabic word 'Tarakhshaqūn', meaning 'bitter herb'.

Each dandelion flowerhead is actually made of more than a hundred tiny individual flowers, called 'florets'. This becomes clearer when the yellow dandelion turns into a dandelion clock – all those floating seeds are from one of the individual florets!

### Getting to know the poem

Ask your class to sit with their eyes closed while you read aloud 'Dandelion' by Gita Ralleigh (see below). Which parts stuck in their heads? The poem is full of vivid images – which ones did they like best? There are no wrong answers! Display the poem and read it again, all the way through. Did anything new stand out on this second reading?

Were they surprised by the look of the poem? There are no stanza breaks; it's all one block. I think Gita has done this deliberately, to echo the dandelion flowerhead itself, closely packed with florets and then seeds!

### Word choice

Gita uses imagery of light to describe the dandelion and get across a sense of its bright beauty. Ask your class to pick out these words: 'dazzling', 'sun', 'golden', 'lamps'. The seedhead is later described as 'a tufted cloud', a direct contrast to the light imagery – but still something beautiful.

She also makes blowing a dandelion clock feel exciting, by using words associated with flight, exploration and adventure. Pick these out together: 'aeronauts', 'ready for launch'.



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## The five senses

Which senses does the speaker call on in the poem? Writers like to appeal to several of the senses in their descriptions, to create a vivid imaginative world.

## Direct address

The speaker in the poem talks directly to the dandelion, calling it 'you'. Why do they think Gita has made this choice? I think it makes the dandelion seem like an individual with unique characteristics, a being we can communicate with and which we should respect.

Does the end of the poem make us reconsider how we think about dandelions?

## Class warm-up

Explain to the class that they are going to write their own poem about something commonly thought of as a weed: a stinging nettle. Go through this Natural History Museum page together, which shows how important nettles are: <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/stinging-nettles.html>

Thinking about the stinging nettle's appearance, behaviour and uses, and the etymology of its botanical name 'Urtica', gather some ideas on the board for how you could describe a stinging nettle, making it seem beautiful and interesting, for example:

- You are a hand-scorcher; you are green fire...
- You are a quiver of green arrows; you are a cluster of toothed hearts...
- You are a knight with a thousand swords; you are a No Entry sign...
- You are a welcome mat for butterflies; you are a hiding place for birds...
- You are a future cup of tea; you are a history of tough threads...

## Individual writing

Invite your pupils to write their own 'Stinging Nettle' poem, using some of the words on the board and their own new ideas. They can follow the structure of Gita's poem or use their own.

Encourage them to think about making creative and imaginative word choices, rather than making their poem rhyme.

Encourage them to be creative and to redraft, scribble out and change things – poets almost never get their poems right first time and their notebooks tend to be very messy! When they're ready to write their poem 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! Email us on [tygertygermagazine@gmail.com](mailto:tygertygermagazine@gmail.com) for some personalised feedback.



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*Inspired by the poem 'Dandelion' by Gita Ralleigh*

*by* .....

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Inspired by a poem in Tyger Tyger Magazine

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## Dandelion

*by Gita Ralleigh*

Snaggled between pavement cracks, you're *dentes de leon*,  
toothed lion, *tarakhshaqūn*, bitter-leaf herb, until the ragged  
petals shake loose, become the dazzling yellow of a sun, if  
the sun was a flower. Each flower of yours is one hundred  
flowers, strung on fields of green like golden lamps. No one  
sees you in between, but suddenly you're a tufted cloud, a  
puffball of silk-furred aeronauts, ready for launch on my  
blown-out breath. And after all these feats of gold, green  
and silver seed? I'm surprised they dare to call you a weed!