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Poetry reading and writing activity: unusual superpowers

A guide to: reading 'My Superpower' by Carole Bromley and 'An unusual superpower' by Vaishnavi Pusapati (see poems below), discussing poetic techniques in the poems, a class writing warm-up, and prompts for individual writing.

Getting to know the poems

Before you read the poems, discuss the idea of superpowers with your class. What are some familiar ones? Can they think of any unusual superpowers? Which superpower would they go for, given the choice? Are all these ideas magical, or do we sometimes use 'superpower' to mean an impressive real-life skill?

Ask your class to sit with their eyes closed and read both poems aloud. What did they think? Which parts stuck in their minds? Were they surprised by the superpowers? There are no wrong answers!

Display the poems (see below) and read them again. Would they like to have the superpower in Carole's poem? Would they use it regularly or only sometimes, like the speaker? How do they think it feels to be the 'you' addressed in the poem? Do they know someone who has a superpower like the mum in Vaishnavi's poem? Would they like to have this power or do they prefer to be surprised by gifts?

Are the superpowers in the two poems magical or real – or perhaps a bit of both?

Tone of voice

Ask your class to think of any 'superpower' films they might have seen. These films tend to be quite dramatic! Are the speakers in these two poems dramatic? I think they are both quite conversational, which isn't necessarily what we'd expect after reading the titles. This makes both poems more surprising and encourages us to think about the concept of having a superpower.

How do they think the speaker of each poem feels about the superpower being described? Again, there are no wrong answers!

'My Superpower'

Carole has chosen an interesting trio of examples: the speaker can see people's bones, what people have had for lunch, and whether their hearts are kind. Carole is using variety and contrast to show the vividness of this superpower, and to suggest what is important to the speaker. I think the mix of humour and seriousness makes this person feel very realistic.

Carole's poem doesn't have a regular rhyme scheme, but the end of each stanza either fully rhymes or half rhymes with the end of the other stanzas. This gives us a satisfying pattern whilst also keeping a conversational tone.



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'An unusual superpower'

Vaishnavi's poem doesn't have a regular rhyme scheme either, but she uses half-rhyme and alliteration to make the poem sound good when read aloud. Can you pick out a couple of examples together?

Vaishnavi has also used a technique called anaphora, where a word or phrase is repeated at the beginning of multiple lines. The poem repeats the word 'She' in the first stanza and 'That is' / 'This is' in the second and third stanzas. What effect does this have? I think it emphasises how many times the mum is proved right and creates a comic effect as the mum casually predicts the contents of her gifts, over and over again.

Class warm-up

Revisit your earlier discussion about superpowers. Are there any more unusual powers to add to the list?

Choose one of the unusual superpowers you have discussed together and write a class poem about it. You will have to choose whether the speaker has the superpower, as in Carole's poem, or whether they are describing someone else, as in Vaishnavi's poem. Can you include:

- three varied examples of the superpower's capabilities
- an instance of half-rhyme
- some anaphora?

Individual writing

Invite your pupils to write their own unusual superpower poem, about something you've discussed, or something new.

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! You can email us on tygertygermagazine@gmail.com for some personalised feedback.



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My Superpower

by Carole Bromley

I can see straight through people,
their bones, what they had for lunch,
whether their heart is kind.

I don't always use this power;
it's enough to know I have it,
that there's nowhere they can hide.

So when I look at you hard like this,
I'm seeing right through you
and out the other side.





An unusual superpower

by Vaishnavi Pusapati

Mom can never
be surprised.
She is immune.
She is always prepared.
She always knows
when anyone gifts her anything.

“That is a dry fruit box inside.
That is a sweet box.”
“That is a sari. That is
a diary for the New Year.”

“That is a book. This is a clock.
This will be a cup.”
We unwrap the glossy paper
and she is right, always.

