



# Tyger Tyger Magazine

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## Poetry reading and writing activity: animal surprise party

A guide to: reading 'There's a Chicken at My Door' by Gaynor Andrews (see below), discussing poetic techniques in the poem, a class poem, and prompts for individual writing.

### Getting to know the poems

Ask your class to sit with their eyes closed and read the poem aloud, stopping before the last stanza. Why do they think the animals might be crowding around? Read the last stanza – did they guess it was a birthday? What kind of animal is the speaker?

Display the poem (see below) and divide the class into ten groups. Give each little group a stanza to rehearse (dividing the fifth stanza into two sets of four lines). Encourage them to enjoy acting out all the sounds, actions and emotions. Then perform the whole poem as a class.

Would they like to be woken up like this on their birthday?

### Word choice

How does Gaynor get across a sense of the dog's frustration with the language she chooses? As a class, pick out words and phrases that illustrate the dog's humorous grumpiness, for example: 'ignore', 'SEE', 'that chicken', 'surlly', 'frustration', 'Oh, and right', 'caterwauling', 'can't they see'...

### Structure

Gaynor has carefully crafted her poem to create a mounting sense of excited chaos. For the first three stanzas, we meet the animals who are bothering the dog speaker one at a time – first the chicken, then the cockerel, then the cat. In stanza four, we meet the chicks, but only after we learn that the chicken and cockerel have 'started up again'. In stanza five, we meet the sheep *and* the cows, and we also hear the 'cock-a-doo-ing' of the cockerel and the 'caterwauling' of the cat, in amongst all the 'baa-aas' and 'mooring'. By stanza seven, all the animals have crowded around the speaker – who is now, unsurprisingly, fully awake – and the chicken who was tapping on the door in stanza one is now tapping even closer!

### Sounds

Go through the poem together and pick out all the different sounds the animals make. Many of these words are onomatopoeic – words which sound like what they are describing. Can they think of any other onomatopoeic animal-sound words?

### Repetition

Gaynor has used lots of repetition to emphasise our sense of a continuous stream of distractions. Go through and note together all the instances of 'And' and 'Now'. Repeating a word or words at the beginning of several lines is called 'anaphora'.



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## Pauses and suspense

The poem is carefully paced to balance the build-up of activity with pauses that create moments of suspense. In stanza six, after an eight-line swirl of noise, we have a single standalone couplet. These two lines are much quieter: the animals are just looking, and the only noise is the small click of the latch being unhooked. Gaynor has used punctuation to emphasise the moment of suspense, with each line followed by an ellipsis: '...'

In stanza eight, there is another ellipsis to create suspense, as we wonder what the dog has just remembered, something which is making its tail thump... Gaynor has also broken the rhyming couplet pattern of the poem with a standalone triplet of rhymes ('grumping' / 'something' / 'thumping'). After the rush of the animals crowding around in stanza seven, these techniques slow the poem down, hint that the reveal is coming, and delay it for a moment.

## Class warm-up

This poem seems to be set on a farm. The dog is in the farmhouse, and the outside animals are crowding inside! Explain to your class that they are going to write their own animal birthday poem, inspired by 'There's a Chicken at My Door', but set somewhere else. What other animal habitats can they think of? For example: pond, woodland, ocean, rainforest, desert, bog, the Arctic, savanna...

Choose one of these habitats together. Who would they choose as the main character? Where would they be sleeping? Who would be coming to wake them up with a birthday surprise? What noises and actions would they make? Draft a poem together, following Gaynor's structure. Don't worry about rhyming the poem but see if you can include a sense of the speaker's frustration, some onomatopoeia, some repetition / anaphora, and some moments of suspense.

## Individual writing

Invite your pupils to write their own animal surprise party poem, choosing their own habitat, characters, and events. They can follow Gaynor's structure or use their own.

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](mailto:tygertygermagazine@gmail.com) for some personalised feedback.



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*Inspired by 'There's a Chicken at My Door' by Gaynor Andrews*

by .....



## There's a Chicken at My Door

*by Gaynor Andrews*

There's a chicken at my door  
that I'm trying to ignore.  
She can SEE that I am napping  
but that chicken keeps on tapping.

Now the cockerel's at it, too,  
with his cock-a-doodle-do.  
And I know I'm looking surly,  
but it really IS quite early!

And look, here comes the cat.  
I'm too sleepy for a chat  
and pre-breakfast conversation  
only adds to my frustration!

Now the cockerel and the hen  
have just started up again  
and the chicks have joined the rapping  
with their clucking and their tapping!

Oh, and right, here come the sheep!  
How's a dog supposed to sleep  
with the baa-aas and cock-a-doo-ing?  
Wait! Now all the cows are mooing,



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while the cat is caterwauling,  
and the sheep have come a-calling!  
(Though it's really not yet morning –  
can't they see that I'm still yawning?)

I can tell that they're all looking...  
I can hear the latch unhooking...

And they're crowding in around me.  
Sheep and cows and chicks surround me.  
Now the cat is on my head  
and the chicken's in my bed!  
And her beak is tap, tap, tapping.  
But there's no more time for napping.

And it's time I stopped my grumping.  
( 'Cos I've just remembered something –  
I can feel my tail start thumping...)

As I open up one eye,  
they meow and bleat and cry,  
"Surprise, surprise! Get out of bed!  
Happy Birthday, Sleepyhead!"



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