Poetry reading and writing activity: spell poems

A guide to reading the poem 'How to Spell a Spell' by Jennifer Watson (see below), exploring poetic techniques in the poem, and writing in response as a class and individually.

Getting to know the poem

Ask your class to sit with their eyes closed and read them 'How to Spell a Spell'. Which was their favourite part of the spell? What would they add to a spell recipe?

Explain to your class that the poem is an acrostic. Can anyone guess what magical word is being spelled out? Read the first few lines again… Then once they've guessed, display the poem and read it through once more.

Class performance

Divide the class into twelve groups and give them each a line to rehearse and perform, with maximum magical drama!

Impossible things

Each line of Jennifer's poem is shimmering with strangeness and contradictions. Go through and discuss why each magical item would be very hard to find indeed…

This is one of the pleasures of poetry, that you can put into words things that do not exist in real life!

It may be helpful to recap the existing sayings which Jennifer has played around with: 'Don't count your chickens before they're hatched' and 'Clear as mud'. Using them makes readers do a sort of double-take as we encounter familiar words used in a new way.

The five senses

Jennifer has crafted her lines to appeal to our five senses. Pick out examples together of words, phrases or images which appeal to our sense of taste and smell (salty); sight (winter tree, daisy chain, candle); touch (snowman's breath, summer's day, drips); and sound (bark, rustle, drips, chime, splash, bubble).

Many of the sound words are onomatopoeic: bark, rustle, drips, splash, bubble. Pick them out and repeat them together, enjoying the sounds of the words and the images they conjure.

Leaving things to our imagination…

The poem ends with a mysterious, magical-sounding phrase: 'a frog's leap year'. The phrase plays on the familiar idea of a Leap Year – a year in which February contains 29 days rather than 28, in order to align the calendar with the precise time it takes for the Earth to circle

Poem © Jennifer Watson, 2026
Resource © Rachel Piercey, 2026

around the Sun. But Jennifer leaves it up to our imaginations to picture what ‘a frog’s leap year’ might mean. What do your pupils think could happen in such a year? There are no wrong answers!

Class warm-up

Explain to your class that you are going to write your own ABRACADABRA acrostic poem all together. Write ABRACADABRA vertically down the board and collect ideas for each letter. Make sure each line describes something impossible to find in the real world.

You don’t need to rhyme your lines but think about how you might appeal to different senses.

What kind of year will you bubble and brew at the end?

Individual writing

Invite your pupils to write their own ABRACADABRA acrostic poem, filling it with impossible things and inventing their own kind of enchanted year at the end. They could also use another magical phrase, like ‘hocus pocus’ or ‘Hey Presto’. The poem doesn’t need to 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 – will it be the same as Jennifer’s or something different?

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 for some personalised feedback.

Poem © Jennifer Watson, 2026
Resource © Rachel Piercey, 2026

Inspired by the poem 'How to Spell a Spell' by Jennifer Watson

by .....

© The Poet
Inspired by a poem in Tyger Tyger Magazine
tygertyger.net

Tyger Tyger Magazine

How to Spell a Spell

A snowman's breath on a summer's day
Bark of a dog with nothing to say
Rustle of leaves in a winter tree
A daisy chain to set you free
Counted chickens before they hatch
A candle lit with a blown-out match
Drips from a dried-up wishing well
A midnight chime from a midday bell
Broken lock with a working key
Rainwater sieved from the salty sea
A splash of mud to make it clear

Bubble and brew for a frog's leap year

by Jennifer Watson



Poem © Jennifer Watson, 2026
First published in Tyger Tyger Magazine, 2026
tygertyger.net