Tyger Tyger Magazine

Poetry reading and writing activity: idiom poems

A guide to reading the poem 'Pocket of Time' by Rachel Beto (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 the first eight lines of 'Pocket of Time', up to 'I put in May / and it turned into…'

See if, guided by the word 'prune' and the sense of the line, they can guess the next word. In the same way, see if they can guess 'pear' and 'hand'.

Display the poem and read it again, all together. Which parts did they like? Which bits stuck in their heads? What is happening to these things? Would they enjoy any of these fast-tracked transformations?

Exploring Repetition

After the first introductory stanza, Rachel's poem uses repetition to create a satisfying pattern. Then the last stanza also has a different structure – this makes it stand out and makes us pay attention to the meaning and the humour.

The lulling repetition helps us see how easy it would be to accidentally put your hand into the pocket of time… and then what would happen?! The pocket is capable of transforming a pebble into sand – that's a process that takes thousands of years!

New transformations

Can your class add ideas for new transformations, following Rachel's pattern in stanzas 2-6? Keep in mind that some of Rachel's items *could* fit in a pocket, but others couldn't, literally speaking. The time shifts are also different for each item. What would happen if you put in a crescent moon, an acorn, a slice of bread, a caterpillar, a day, a dream, a hope, a word…?

Playing with language

Explain to your class that poets are inspired by all different kinds of language. Sometimes, they play around with existing phrases, to see what would happen if they used the words in a new way.

The phrase 'a pocket of time' means a stretch of time sandwiched between two other activities, drawing on the way a pocket is made of the space between two pieces of fabric.

However, Rachel has imagined a situation where the pocket really does exist, in an old jacket. Then she's had fun imagining what would happen if you used a pocket for its normal function, i.e. to put things inside!

Poem © Rachel Beto, 2026
Resource © Rachel Piercey, 2026

Idioms

'A pocket of time' is an idiom. Recap idioms with your class: phrases which we use to mean something other than the actual, literal meaning of the words. Discuss the meaning of the following idioms, and how they are different to the literal meaning of the words:

- Do something at the drop of a hat
- Let the cat out of the bag
- Bark up the wrong tree

Can they think of any others to add to the list?

Class warm-up

Explain to the class that you are going to write your own idiom poem. You'll choose a common phrase and have fun taking it literally! As a class, choose an idiom together from the list above, or below, or one you have thought of together:

- Blessing in disguise
- Under the weather
- A perfect storm
- Wild goose chase
- Spill the beans
- The elephant in the room

Discuss a phrase you might repeat in the poem, for example: 'The blessing was wearing…', 'Beans on the… Beans in the…', 'It's here in the room and it's…'

Then build your poem around these repeated phrases. You don't need to make it rhyme; focus on having fun with the ideas. You might like to vary the first and last stanzas, as in 'Pocket of Time'. Rachel adds humour and a twist at the end of her poem. How will you finish yours?

Individual writing

Invite your pupils to write their own new idiom poem, choosing another phrase from the list. As with the class poem, they don't need to make it 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 for some personalised feedback.

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Inspired by the poem 'Pocket of Time' by Rachel Beto

by .....

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Inspired by a poem in Tyger Tyger Magazine
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Pocket of Time

I found a pocket of time
in an old jacket of mine.
I wondered what would happen
if I put something inside?

So I put in a plum
and it turned to a prune.

I put in May
and it turned into June.

I put in a cub
that turned to a bear.

I put in a seed
that turned to a pear.

I put in a pebble
that turned into sand.

I've got to make sure
not to put in my hand!

by Rachel Beto

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