



Hi.

This is a

TEACHING RESOURCE PACK

for use with

A PASSING ON OF SHELLS

50 Fifty-Word Poems by Simon Lamb

Illustrated by Chris Riddell

Published by Scallywag Press, 2023

We recommend using it with

students aged 7–14. Enjoy!

Love, Team Scallywag x

This teaching resource – prepared by the poet – contains nine lesson plans for writing activities inspired by nine poems within the collection. They can be used individually or as three sequences of three lessons, aimed at students aged 7–9, 9–11 and 11–14, respectively. These age ranges are for guidance only, and you may find suitable material for your students throughout the entire resource.

Each lesson plan is presented in three parts: an exploration of a poem from the book; followed by a writing activity; and time in which to share with peers. For each lesson, students only require one blank piece of A3 paper and something with which to write.

Each input is designed to last for up to approx. one hour, and those delivering the lessons are welcome to amend and adapt as they see fit. This is only a guide, after all, and there are endless ways in which the book, its poems and its illustrations can be used to inspire learning in classrooms and beyond. We hope you have fun sharing our *Shells*.

Resource by Simon Lamb (www.simonlambcreative.co.uk)

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We recommend using episodes 1–3 with students aged 7–9, episodes 4–6 with students aged 9–11, and episodes 7–9 with students aged 11–14. That said, we would encourage exploration of all nine lesson plans as activities may be suitable for use in your setting outwith their suggested age range.

EPISODE 1 — NINE LIVES OF CAT-SÌTH

Inspired by *Nine Lives of Cat*

Part 1

- Introduce students to the book *A Passing On of Shells: 50 Fifty-Word Poems*.
- Begin by sharing the poem's title. Are students familiar with the myth of a cat having nine lives?
- Read the poem (p.98/99) aloud.
- Display the poem's spread (text and illustration) visually, and read the poem again, asking students to pay particular attention to the rhyme scheme.
- Discuss the poem and its accompanying illustration(s), inviting contributions from students. You may like to talk about some or all of the following:
 - the rhyme scheme, where the second line of each couplet rhymes with the first of the next;
 - the repeated sounds in the second line of each couplet ("start of the tale", "cool and calm");
 - the order in which the cat's lives are lived (roughly representing human history from first fire through Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions to the age of celebrity and beyond);
 - the illustrator's use of white cats with angel wings for the ghosts of lives one through eight and the black cat for the present, ninth life;
 - imagined ways in which some of the first eight lives of the cat may have been lost.

Part 2

- Introduce students to the Celtic myth of the cat-sìth – the fairy cat (pronounced *cat-shee*) – a large pitch-black cat with a white spot upon its chest.
- Share some of the legends surrounding cat-sìth, easily discoverable online, or simply assert for the purposes of this lesson that the cat is associated with sinister goings-on.
- Split students into nine groups, giving each a number from one to nine, respectively.
- As a writing team, each group should write one rhyming couplet detailing one life lived by cat-sìth. Every first line should begin with "My (first) was _____", where the blank is a place, and the second line should go on to tell the reader about something nefarious the cat did during that life and in that place. The two lines must rhyme; the second line can be as long as required.
- An example verse: "My fourth was fridge. / I ate all the cheese and left not a smidge!"
- Advise students not to settle for their first idea without first playing with other options.
- It's writing time!

Part 3

- Bring the teams back together, and invite one representative from each team to come forward as reader, positioning the nine verses from left to right, with the remaining students as audience.
- Collaboratively with the respective readers, read aloud the students' new poem, *Nine Lives of Cat-sìth*, verse by verse.
- Discuss the new poem, highlighting good practice, and review the lesson's learning.

EPISODE 2 — IN A COAT OF MANY POCKETS

Inspired by *Pocket Poem*

Part 1

- Re-introduce students to the book *A Passing On of Shells: 50 Fifty-Word Poems*.
- Begin by sharing the poem's title. What do students usually keep in their pockets?
- Read the poem (p.46/47) aloud.
- Display the poem's spread (text and illustration) visually, and read the poem again, asking students to pay particular attention to how the text is laid out on the page.
- Discuss the poem and its accompanying illustration, inviting contributions from students. You may like to talk about some or all of the following questions:
 - Why might the speaker keep a "perfect pen, midnight blue" in their pockets?
 - Why might the speaker keep "marshmallows for toasting" in their pockets?
 - Why might the speaker keep a "curl of sky" in their pockets?
 - Why might the speaker keep a "promise" in their pockets?
 - Why might the illustrator have represented the speaker as being old in the illustration?
 - What is the poem attempting to say about who we are? (There are potentially no "right" answers to any of these, of course, and students should be made aware of this.)

Part 2

- Fold the A3 paper in half like a book. With a pencil (and ruler, if desired), draw a vertical line and a horizontal line, splitting the left-hand-side into quarters.
- Ask students to think about themselves: who are they? What are the things that make them *them*?
- Students should write down four items that represent aspects of themselves, one in each box. The chosen items definitely don't have to realistically fit inside a coat's pocket. They could be a real possession or otherwise. For example, if a student loves swimming, they could choose to write down *a pair of swimming goggles* or *a swimming pool* or . . . anything they like, really.
- Students will now fashion these four "things" into four couplets such as those seen in *Pocket Poem*. Each first line should begin of the ilk, "In here", "Over there", "In this one", etc. Each second line – including its construction – is up to each individual student. Playing with words and phrases should be encouraged. The four couplets are to be written on the right-hand-side.
- An example verse: "*In this one / a swimming pool splashed on Tuesday night.*"
- Students should start their poem by copying the first line from *Pocket Poem*.
- It's writing time!

Part 3

- Students should finish their poem by copying the final five lines from *Pocket Poem*.
- Invite students to share their work with their peers, theatre-style, highlighting well-constructed lines and well-conceived images, praising the efforts of the young poets in capturing themselves.

EPISODE 3 — KNOW YOU FOREVER

Inspired by *What I Know About You*

Part 1

- Re-introduce students to the book *A Passing On of Shells: 50 Fifty-Word Poems*.
- Begin by sharing the poem's title. Note its straightforwardness and the implication that the title is introducing a list of things known about the titular "You".
- Read the poem (p.104/105) aloud.
- Display the poem's spread (text and illustration) visually, and read the poem again.
- Discuss the poem and its accompanying illustration, inviting contributions from students. You may like to talk about some or all of the following:
 - the form of the poem, being a list;
 - the general softness, the gentleness, of the sound of the poem after the "dazzling" opening;
 - the science behind "swirling starlight wrapped in skin";
 - the oxymoron of "tidy mess";
 - the epic, life-spanning implications of "beginnings and endings and all the in-betweens";
 - the conviction of the "Yes" in the poem's closing line.

Part 2

- Invite students to think about the special people in their life: family members, friends, school staff, instructors, etc. Students are to choose one person about whom they'd like to write.
- Fold the A3 paper in half. On the left-hand-side, students should mind map as much about their chosen person as possible. Suggest the following prompts: physical appearance; where they live; what they do; what they like; what students like about them; when students see them; favourite memories together; how they spend time with one another. This is simply a brain dump.
- Students are now going to craft lines of poetry from all they have generated so far. The title is "*What I Know About _____*", where the blank is the special person's name.
- Each line starts with "*You are _____*", followed by a poetic phrasing of the student's construction. Encourage students not just to list qualities but to list things as little poetic images.
- An example line: "*You are a Sunday afternoon picnic with crisps and shortbread.*"
- It's writing time!

Part 3

- Invite students to share their work with their peers, theatre-style, highlighting well-constructed lines and well-conceived images, praising the efforts of the young poets in capturing these special people.
- Remind students that with creativity, paper and something with which to write, they are capable of pinning things down for their future selves. In this way, poems – art – can be seen as a time machine, to be kept, used and known forever.

EPISODE 4 — SOME WORDS OF POETIC ADVICE

Inspired by *Advice on How to Care for a Fallen Star*

Part 1

- Introduce students to the book *A Passing On of Shells: 50 Fifty-Word Poems*.
- Begin by sharing the poem's title. Before reading the poem, ask students what advice they'd give to someone caring for a fallen star.
- Read the poem (p.90/91) aloud.
- Display the poem's spread (text and illustration) visually, and read the poem again.
- Discuss the poem and its accompanying illustration, inviting contributions from students. You may like to talk about some or all of the following:
 - the structure of the poem, being a list of *Do nots* with a concluding *Instead* statement;
 - the relevance of each piece of advice;
 - the lullaby to which the third verse refers, being "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star", of course;
 - the overall usefulness of the advice;
 - the meaning of the poem's conclusion and, thus, the meaning of the poem.

Part 2

- Fold the A3 paper in half. Half the left-hand-side with a horizontal line. In the top half, invite students to thought-shower processes they go through in their day-to-day life (eg. getting to school, brushing their teeth). Give them a few minutes to think of some and to write them down.
- Students then choose one of these processes to explore. In the bottom half, they should jot down a simple list of things they do throughout the chosen process. Give another few minutes.
- The challenge is now to construct a poem structured as a list of *Do nots*, where the advice can stretch from the sensible to the frankly bizarre. As with the original poem, the first line of each verse should tell the reader what they should not do, and the second line of each verse should tell them why they should not do it.
- Poems are to be written on the right-hand-side, with the title "*Advice on How to _____*".
- Tell students not to worry about writing a concluding verse . . . yet. For now, they should focus on the content and phrasing of their *Do nots*.
- Remember to encourage wild creativity.
- It's writing time!

Part 3

- As the writing time ends, invite students to write a concluding *Instead* verse. Suggest that the verse could be clever or funny or heartfelt — but that it should feel like a finale to the poem.
- Theatre-style, invite students to share their new poems with their peers. Ensure that the space is a positive one, one where creativity is acknowledged and one in which responses to the new work are encouraged.

EPISODE 5 — BRIDGING A PAIR OF STATES

Inspired by *The Sun's Lament*

Part 1

- Re-introduce students to the book *A Passing On of Shells: 50 Fifty-Word Poems*.
- Begin by sharing the poem's title. What is a "lament"?
- Read the poem (p.96/97) aloud.
- Display the poem's spread (text and illustration) visually, and read the poem again.
- Discuss the poem and its accompanying illustration, inviting contributions from students. You may like to talk about some or all of the following:
 - the aim of the poem: to see our planet from the Sun's point-of-view;
 - the use of diminishing lines to visually represent sunset;
 - the precise word choice of "*despondently*" and what it achieves;
 - the use of italics for the thoughts of the Sun;
 - the use of longer lines as the Sun begins to pull itself together.

Part 2

- Fold the A3 paper in half. Half the left-hand-side with a horizontal line. In the top half, invite students to thought-shower pairs of states (eg. red light / green light, full tank / empty tank, sharp pencil / blunt pencil). Give them a few minutes to think of some and to write them down.
- Students then choose one of these pairs of states. In the bottom half, they should explore ideas of what could happen to get from one state to the other. Ideas can be straightforward or outlandish. Give another few minutes for such play.
- The challenge is now to fashion a poem that takes one state to another. In doing so, the hope is that students will find something to say beyond the "story" of the change of state. For example, a poem inspired by a sharp and subsequently blunt pencil could muse on the writing created in its time; a poem inspired by a full and subsequently empty tank could explore the journey of the vessel and all it learns upon its adventure.
- Poems are to be written on the right-hand-side. The first line should be the starting state and the last line should be the closing state. Everything else is up to the poet.
- In this activity, students should be encouraged especially to think about precise word choice and how the words are presented upon the page. Use the "setting" of the poem to help inform these choices.
- It's writing time!

Part 3

- Theatre-style, invite students to share their new poems with their peers. Again, ensure this is a supportive space and, where possible, tease out details from poems that really display the malleability of the art form.
- Invite students to share whether any poems made them look at something in a new light.

EPISODE 6 — A CLOSE OBSERVATION

Inspired by *Tales from a Garden*

Part 1

- Re-introduce students to the book *A Passing On of Shells: 50 Fifty-Word Poems*.
- Begin by sharing the poem's title.
- Read the poem (p.78/79) aloud.
- Display the poem's spread (text and illustration) visually, and read the poem again.
- Discuss the poem and its accompanying illustration, inviting contributions from students. You may like to talk about some or all of the following:
 - repetition (lines 2, 4); alliteration (lines 1, 4, 5); personification (lines 5, 7).
 - Choose and discuss specific images (from the first part of the poem, p.78) and their effectiveness. For example, the active joy of "*Worms chorus line / their soil theatre.*"
 - Without the final three lines, what is the impression of the poem?
 - What is the significance of a "single" magpie landing?
 - What is the effect of the final three lines on the poem as a whole?
 - What is the poem about? (As is usually the way with art, there is no single correct answer.)

Part 2

- Ask students to think of a place with which they are intimately familiar.
- Fold the A3 paper in half. Write the chosen place in the middle of the left-hand-page.
- Students are to mind map their chosen place by noting down details as a reporter might factually note them. Give students some time to mind map in this way.
- The challenge is to transform these notes into a closely observed poem, where each detail becomes its own little image within the whole.
- Encourage students to think of the techniques used in the aforementioned poem, as well as other techniques they already know. How can they phrase something simple in a delicious way?
- Students can expand the mind map with their poetic lines before transferring them to the right-hand-side where they will build their poem. The title is "*Tales from _____*".
- Students should not yet try to accomplish a closing to their poem (such as was seen with the arrival of the magpie). Instead, they should focus on the intricacies of their crafted images.
- It's writing time!

Part 3

- Invite students to conclude their poem. How? Something should change. Something of the observed scene should alter, and that should lead to the poem's conclusion. Something should end the process of observation, returning poet and reader to the world beyond the poem.
- Theatre-style, invite students to share their new poems with their peers. Highlight images that stand out and share, personally, why. Invite students to do the same.

EPISODE 7 — TILTING THE EVERYDAY

Inspired by *How to Start an Adventure*

Part 1

- Introduce students to the book *A Passing On of Shells: 50 Fifty-Word Poems*.
- Begin by sharing the poem's title, and read the poem (p.8/9) aloud.
- Display the poem's spread (text and illustration) visually, and read the poem again.
- Invite students to discuss – as a class – the poem and its accompanying illustration. You may like to use the following as prompts:
 - How is the poem structured?
 - How is rhyme used in the poem?
 - How is the indentation of lines used throughout the poem?
 - What is the cumulative effect of the use of short, simple lines of instruction?
 - What is the effect of the poem's title on the poem itself?
 - What is the poem's purpose?

Part 2

- This poem takes a small, familiar process – getting up from the sofa, putting on shoes and going outside – and attempts to re-fashion it as a piece of written art, a poem.
- Ask students to think of things they do every single day, processes with which they are intimately familiar.
- Fold the A3 paper in half. On the left-hand-page, students are to write a list of exact instructions for completing one chosen process. Encourage the inclusion of the smallest of details.
- The challenge is to rework the factual instructions into a poem by making use of any poetic techniques and devices known to students.
- As they craft their poem – in second-person, on the right-hand-side – they should think deeply on their precise word choice, the images they are making for the reader, rhyme and rhythm and the taste of their words in their mouth.
- They should engage fully with their chosen process, working out how best it can inform their writing. To see it, but to see it slant. With new eyes.
- This writing task attempts to challenge students to elevate their chosen process from everyday occurrence into an attention-given moment.
- It's writing time!

Part 3

- Whether students sharing their work aloud with their peers is appropriate within the given setting is left to the one delivering the lesson. If sharing takes place, highlight good practice, and share, personally, how you respond to the newly-created work.
- Conclude by commenting that poetry – art – allows writers to capture moments, however plain.

EPISODE 8 — LONG AGO AND FAR AWAY

Inspired by *On Breakers*

Part 1

- Re-introduce students to the book *A Passing On of Shells: 50 Fifty-Word Poems*.
- Begin by sharing the poem's title, and read the poem (p.64/65) aloud.
- Display the poem's spread (text and illustration) visually, and read the poem again.
- Invite students to discuss – as a class – the poem and its accompanying illustration. You may like to use the following as prompts:
 - How is the poem structured?
 - What is each verse seemingly about?
 - What effect do the double-slashes have at the end of each verse?
 - What effect do the italics have in the line "*Rejoice! Rejoice!*"?
 - What is meant by the statement of the indented final line?
 - What is the overall impression created by the poem?

Part 2

- This poem appears to be about memories from somewhere long ago and far away.
- Ask students to think of a place in which they've spent time but not too much time. A special place, perhaps from a holiday or a day out or a visit. Somewhere of some relevance to the student but not somewhere with which they are intimately familiar, and not somewhere they have recently spent time. Somewhere from an almost-forgotten memory.
- Fold the A3 paper in half. Invite students to mind map on the left-hand-side everything they can think of that they'd associate with their chosen place, related to their experience of it. This is a brain dump and can be as messy and unorganised as required.
- The challenge is to sift through that which was created during the brain dump in search of small fragments that students deem worthy of exploration through poetry.
- For each such fragment, students are to craft a three line verse in response, thinking deeply on word choice, image and sound. Encourage, as ever, that poetry is play, and that their writing may not make total literal sense. (Revisit the opening verse of the poem for an example of this.)
- On the right-hand-side, students will construct a poem built of these three-line verses — and experimentation beyond the constraint should be allowed, of course. What can they catch?
- It's writing time!

Part 3

- Again, whether students sharing their work aloud with their peers is appropriate within the given setting is left to the one delivering the lesson. If sharing takes place, highlight good practice, and share, personally, how you respond to the newly-created work.
- Conclude by commenting that poetry – art – allows writers to explore that which we may have thought forgotten.

EPISODE 9 — REMINISCENCE AT THE EDGE

Inspired by *The Boys at Summer's End*

Part 1

- Re-introduce students to the book *A Passing On of Shells: 50 Fifty-Word Poems*.
- Begin by sharing the poem's title, and read the poem (p.102/103) aloud.
- Display the poem's spread (text and illustration) visually, and read the poem again.
- Invite students to discuss – as a class – the poem and its accompanying illustration. You may like to use the following as prompts:
 - In what ways does the poem address the theme of “endings”? (See: deliberate word choice; diminishing line count in verses; setting, in terms of both place and time of day; etc.)
 - How does the poem make the reader feel?

Part 2

- This poem appears to be about the conclusion of childhood: a coming-of-age story, if you will.
- Invite students to reflect on their childhood. What incredibly strong memories do they have of being a kid? Those golden moments they'll never forget. Give time to think. Offer inspiration of the types of memories students may consider.
- Fold the A3 paper in half. Invite students to write – in prose and at length – about their chosen childhood memory. They should aim to get as much down on the left-hand-side as possible, perhaps using the following prompts to really explore the memory:
 - Who? What? Where? Why? When? How?
 - Vision. Touch. Taste. Smell. Hearing.
 - How does it feel to revisit the memory?
 - Why choose that particular memory?
- The challenge is to take the generated prose and from it craft a poem and, in doing so, capture the chosen moment of childhood on the page.
- The idea is that, having already “written the story” of the moment, students will be less tempted to fall into the trap of just spinning a narrative rather than writing a piece of poetry.
- Poems are to be written on the right-hand-side, and students should be reminded that everything they create is of their design: what they write, goes. So they should be bold in exploring their voice. Poetry is play. So play.
- It's writing time!

Part 3

- Again, whether students sharing their work aloud with their peers is appropriate within the given setting is left to the one delivering the lesson. If sharing takes place, highlight good practice, and share, personally, how you respond to the newly-created work.
- Conclude by commenting that poetry – art – allows writers to pin life to a piece of paper forever, ready to be – in the words of the poet – endlessly tipped out.