

# CHANNELLING WORDS

**Ten poems in ten poetic styles for schools,  
inspired by the 1066 Battle of Hastings  
by Steve Tasane**

**To stimulate discussion, poetry and performance  
from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 3**



Supported by Hastings Borough Council and Arts Council England

## **For Display**

Schools will be able to create visual displays using these or their own sourced images (or pupils' own drawings) accompanied by their sequence of pupils' poems.

## **For a Rap Battle or Public Performance**

Using this guide as a springboard, pupils will be invited to make a live performance of their poems, backdropped by their visual displays, with the additional choice of a poetry competition known as a Poetry Slam or Rap Battle.

## **Ten example poems, and the ten images accompanying them**

Each of the following poems will demonstrate poetry form and technique from the very simplest to the more challenging.

The definitions of the types of poems are given in the toolkit at the end of the poetry section.

The images inspiring the poems are primarily of the Battle of Hastings, or of themes that relate more generally to the impact of 1066 such as

crossing borders, the meeting of cultures, and the idea of competitive sport which can bring people together in celebration rather than conflict.

Teachers can work with pupils from the enclosed images, or select their own images relating to 1066, either with, or for pupils. Teachers can focus on whichever elements of the project they prefer.

While the writing of more sophisticated poetry forms – such as the sonnet and pantoum – will be more appropriately attempted by older Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 pupils, all the poems here can be enjoyed by pupils across the year groups. The more straightforward types of poems – such as the acrostic or the haiku – can be attempted by pupils of most ages.

Pupils will be able to mix'n'match when producing their poems – using any type of poem to write about any image they prefer. In this way, the full ten poems and images will serve as an appropriate creative stimulus for both primary and secondary schools.

## **The Teachers' Toolkit**

In the pages following the ten poems and images, the Teachers' Toolkit gives simple definitions of the types of poems, and writing tips and creative games. Teachers can dip into different sections of the Toolkit depending on which aspect of literacy they are studying with their pupils.

We hope you enjoy your time Channelling Words!

## **The Poems**

As well as the ten poems and images below, you can also hear the poems (and in three instances, watch Steve performing them) on YouTube. The ten poems are split into these two separate films:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVqbucJijlo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPiOZObZraM>

## **1. ARMED AND DANGEROUS**

(a poem with a four line rhyming scheme)

Here is my axe with the deadliest blade.  
In the face of its fury all foes are afraid.  
It's swung in an arc that they cannot evade.  
It's swift and remorseless, my enemy's slayed.

Here is my sword, silver and steel,  
Delivering wounds from which no one can heal.  
Its power is mighty, its power is real,  
Dispatching attackers with righteous zeal.

Here is my armour, made out of chains.  
It protects my limbs, my bones and my brains.  
It keeps the blood safe in my veins,  
Though I risk getting rusty each time it rains.

My fighting arm batters, it thrusts and hacks,  
While my armour never ever cracks.  
I would be not safe from fierce attacks  
Without my chainmail, my sword, my axe.



## 2. WAR CRIES

(a poem using onomatopoeia)

Fourteen thousand pounding hearts  
Two armies roar, the battle starts

The flap of flags, the swish of tails  
Clip-clop of hooves, frightened wails

Whispering grass, echoing field  
The axeman's grunt, the clattering shield

A clang of sword, a clink of chain  
A crunch of bone, a yelp of pain

An arrow's whoosh, the thud of feet  
A snorting horse, the yell "Retreat!"

A groaning body, a snapping spear  
A dying gasp, a victory cheer



### **3. THE SORRY SOLDIER**

(a pantoum)

I hope I escape with my life  
I wish I was back in my bed  
I ache to get back to my wife  
I wish I was rested and fed

I wish I was back in my bed  
My future is written in blood  
I wish I was rested and fed  
My battle's a battle for good

My future is written in blood  
My horse is exhausted like me  
My battle's a battle for good  
I fight for my right to be free

My horse is exhausted like me  
My battle is brutal and slow  
I fight for my right to be free  
I'm thrusting the blade at my foe

My battle is brutal and slow  
I ache to get back to my wife  
I'm thrusting the blade at my foe  
I hope I escape with my life



#### 4. STAY ON TRACK

(an acrostic poem)

Silent, strong, steel and true  
Trained to travel in the straightest line  
Aiming to help, not aiming to hurt  
You can all keep step with me

Ordinary people follow my way  
Nobody comes to harm from me

Taking folk from coast to coast  
Right across the hills and fields  
Always here, through thick and thin  
Come young and old, come all of you  
Keep on track and trust my rails



## 5. QUICK MARCH

(a sonnet)

King Harold is a brave and fearsome king.  
His army homegrown, from his Saxon land.  
They'll march two hundred miles at his command,  
Long lines of ants, troops with a deadly sting.  
Uprisings are crushed down where they are planned.  
From north to south you'll hear his warriors sing,  
Ten thousand bows and arrows in their slings.  
They march to victory at every stand.  
The Norman army landed, and waits by.  
The Saxons charge, while William stands his ground,  
His patient plan to lure them out to die.  
Norman lines open up, then they surround.  
An arrow in two seconds finds its eye,  
And Harold to his famous fate is bound.



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## **6. THINGS TO DO IN A BATTLEFIELD**

(a list poem)

**Go for a stroll  
Blow bubbles  
Have a picnic  
Chase butterflies  
Pretend to be a dragon  
Look for old bones  
Have a sword fight with sticks  
Imagine being a real soldier  
Listen to the birdsong  
Catch a hopping frog  
Walk a dog  
Sneak up on a fox  
Crawl through the long grass  
Daydream**



## 7. MYSTERY VESSEL

(a puzzle poem)

Without legs or wheels I can travel for miles  
I'm made of planks held by ropes or nails  
I'm propelled by arms or what blows through sky  
I'm wet around me but inside I am dry  
If you travel on me – beware, you might feel sick  
But if there's a flood you'll find I'm just the trick  
What am I?



answer: a boat

## **8. JUMBO**

(a kenning)

**I am a cloud buster  
A nose thruster  
I am a bird scarer  
A passenger bearer**

**I am a jetstream trailer  
An air mailer  
I am a horizon hurtler  
A globe circler**

**I am a heavens reacher  
A metal screecher  
I am a border dissolver  
I am a distance solver**

**I am a sky train  
I am a jet plane**



## **9. SERIOUS SPORT**

(a haiku sequence)

With sweat and effort  
Determination and strength  
We might make a team

When we lose our cool  
And argue with each other  
The other side wins

If we lose with pride  
But played our very best  
Victory is ours

The crowd cheers us on  
There is a song in our hearts  
This is truly sport

Playing tough but fair  
Respecting our opponents  
We climb to the top

If we defeat you  
Or we are beaten by you  
It is only play

We stand united  
We will hold the cup up high  
For the world to see



## 10. BATTLE RAP

(a rap)

"I'm King Harold and I can channel  
a marching army from battle to battle.  
The storming Normans ignored my warnings  
so my war men are swarming now the day is dawning.  
We won't let the horde in, breeching our borders.  
We'll kick them into touch, disarray and disorder,  
deliver them a battering, send them scattering.  
The rabble will be clamouring to get back to the Channel  
when we've given them a hammering.  
The Frenchman's henchmen aren't too tough to mention –  
all that *Ooh la la* is losing our attention,  
camped in tents with deadly intention,  
sharpening their arrows, ratcheting the tension,  
sticking their oar in, waging war in the hope it's rewarding.  
But it's seaside suicide, they're in deep water  
like whales that are beached, or cattle to the slaughter.  
We'll battle to the bitter end, exactly as we ought to."

"I'm William The First, thirsting for trouble,  
mess with me, I'm gonna pop your bubble.  
I'll axe the Saxons, batter their shields,  
and attack the battalions in the battlefield.  
We'll dominate the drama, shatter their armour,  
leave them weeping for their sheep and crying for their *Mama*.  
I'll have over-the-hill-Harold right over a barrel.  
That sadsack Saxon ought to throw in the towel,  
cos I'm William the Conqueror, totally superior,  
scarier than a pit-bull terrier tearing up the area.  
I'll pillage all your apples, put a boot up your posterior.  
You'll never evade us, we're invincible invaders.  
This is the field where you're gonna get slayed  
as down in the valley, we lay waiting  
to lay waste Harold in the Battle of Hastings.  
He's gonna get one in the eye. Listen to him cry,  
see him going down before I sieze his crown,  
cos my name is William, I'm notorious,  
they call me the Conqueror cos I'm totally victorious."



# The Teachers' Toolkit

## **1. ARMED AND DANGEROUS**

**(a poem with a four line rhyming scheme)**

### Rhyme schemes

A rhyme scheme describes the different patterns of rhyme in a poem. This poem uses the same rhyme at the end of four lines in a row. Often poems will rhyme for two lines in a row, and these are referred to as rhyming couplets. Sometimes a poem will rhyme every alternate line. A rhyming poem can consist of any number of combinations, or patterns, of rhyme. These are usually described by using letters of the alphabet. The first rhyme is marked with the letter a, the next with b, and so on.

Here is my axe with the deadliest blade. (a)  
In the face of its fury all foes are afraid. (a)  
It's swung in an arc that they cannot evade. (a)  
It's swift and remorseless, my enemy's slayed. (a)

Here is my sword, silver and steel, (b)  
Delivering wounds from which no one can heal. (b)  
Its power is mighty, its power is real, (b)  
Dispatching attackers with righteous zeal. (b)

Here is my armour, made out of chains. (c)

...and so on.

A simple rhyming couplet rhyme scheme would be demonstrated like this:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall (a)  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall (a)  
All the King's horses and all the King's men (b)  
Couldn't put Humpty together again (b)

Regular rhyme schemes used within poems elsewhere in Channelling Words, are demonstrated in their own section of the notes.

### Rhyming Tips and Activities

Not all poetry rhymes. Sometimes, the desire to rhyme can intrude on the writing of a poem, particularly in terms of accurately reflecting a scene or picture, or where the poem has a clear story to tell. Pupils may be too easily tempted to introduce rhyming words that do not belong in the story.

If, however, pupils are attempting to write using a repeated a/a/a/a, b/b/b/b, c/c/c/c rhyme scheme, they should select rhymes that have a large selection of words from which to choose. For instance, it is far easier to find several rhymes for *horse* than it is for *elephant*. It is helpful to go through the letters of the alphabet and write down a list of rhymes on scrap paper, and then cross out the rhyming words that clearly do not belong to the story of image within the poem.

It is not necessarily helpful to use rhyming dictionaries, as these encourage pupils to use rhymes that are not part of their vocabulary and more likely to fit badly into the poem's story/image.

Here are three games to help pupils develop their rhyming skills.

### Rhyming Tennis

Two players face each other, batting a rhyme back and forth. Players must use a new word each time they bat, and it must be a full rhyme (such as *shoot* with *boot* – but not *boot* with *boat*. Both the consonant at the end of the word, and the vowel that precedes it must be exactly the same sound). If a player repeats a word, says *umm* or cannot respond after five seconds, they have lost. The teacher may use their discretion as to how strictly this applies. Slang words (within the context of appropriate language) are allowed, but words must actually exist. If a player says a word and the other player thinks this is made up, the player must be able to prove the word exists by supplying its meaning.

It is important that the teacher chooses the rhyming word. If a tricky word is chosen the game is not much fun; the aim is to use words like *sun* to see how many rhymes the pupils can come up with. Avoid words with obvious embarrassing results. If unsure, have a list of starting rhyme words written out beforehand. Here are a few examples of words with lots of obvious rhymes:

eye...hair...skin...ears...score...wall...tree...blow...skip...wood...sun...  
pen...glue.

A tip the teacher can give the class is for each player to plan ahead while the other player is thinking of their word, and also to go through the alphabet to seek out a rhyme. The teacher can also encourage pupils to use rhymes of more than one syllable, such as *reply*, *deny*, *unfair*, *debonair*, etc.

The rest of the class will be trying to think of rhyming words for the players, but calling out words can cause confusion. This can be avoided by playing with two teams (such as boys versus girls, Anglo-Saxons versus Normans) and if someone from either team calls out a word, their player is automatically out.

## Circle Rhymes

This is similar to the above, but each team goes round in a circle, adding a new rhyming word, with the same rules as above. The winning team comes up with the highest number of rhymes. Or the class as a whole can play this, and try to beat its own record.

## Rhyming I-Spy

I-Spy, applied to a projected single picture (as opposed to the room around us) is a great starting point for identifying the different elements and narrative of a picture. This can be extended to Rhyming I-Spy to help develop rhyming skills. For instance, if pupils were looking at a scene from the Bayeux tapestry, they would identify an image in the picture and then think of a word that rhymes with that. So, if they spotted a spear, they would say:

“I spy with my little eye, something that rhymes with fear.”

The rest of the class would try and guess the word by the rhyme. They might guess incorrectly with a word such as “ear” before coming up with the correct answer “spear”.

## **2. WAR CRIES** (a poem using onomatopoeia)

Onomatopoeia is where the sounds in a word imitate or suggest what the word refers to.

- drip
- splash
- creak
- quack

Onomatopoeia is a literacy tool that can be used in any style of poem. It is helpful for a teacher to ask pupils when looking at a scene or reimagining a story, to ask what we might hear if we were present, and listening to the events unfolding. If we learn to *listen* to a picture, it helps provide us with the skills to translate that picture into a poem.

### 3. THE SORRY SOLDIER

#### (a pantoum)

A pantoum is written in four line verses (known as quatrains).

The second and fourth line of each verse become the first and third lines of the next.

Its rhyme scheme is a/b/a/b, b/c/b/c, c/d/c/d, and so forth, as annotated below.

In the final verse, the first and third lines of the first verse (which have not yet been repeated) are used in reverse order as the second and fourth lines, so that the poem starts and ends with the same line.

The impact of this is that each line is *emphasised* by repetition, and the opening statement is *affirmed* by the contemplative essence of the poem, and in its *reassertion* at the conclusion.

The form of the pantoum is very useful for capturing mood. It is a deceptively simple-sounding poem (and only requires the writing of ten lines for its twenty line length). But the tricky part is coming up with single line statements that complement the mood of the rest of the poem, whilst making sense as isolated sentences.

This is a challenging piece of writing for pupils with well-developed literacy skills, or an ideal poem to write as a class poem together.

It is also a poem that requires *listening* to the rhythm, as each line sounds the same. A good tip is to voice a suggested line, followed by *duh daddy duh daddy duh dah* to see if the rhythm matches.

I hope I escape with my life (a)  
I wish I was back in my bed (b)  
I ache to get back to my wife (a)  
I wish I was rested and fed (b)

I wish I was back in my bed (b)  
My future is written in blood (c)  
I wish I was rested and fed (b)  
My battle's a battle for good (c)

My future is written in blood (c)  
My horse is exhausted like me (d)  
My battle's a battle for good (c)  
I fight for my right to be free (d)

My horse is exhausted like me (d)  
My battle is brutal and slow (e)  
I fight for my right to be free (d)  
I'm thrusting the blade at my foe (e)

My battle is brutal and slow (e)  
I ache to get back to my wife (a)  
I'm thrusting the blade at my foe (e)  
I hope I escape with my life (a)

## **4. STAY ON TRACK** (an acrostic poem)

Acrostic poems are the simplest of all, as they only require the first letter of each line to spell out a word, or message, of the pupils' choice. They do not need to rhyme or demonstrate a metrical pattern (but they may do, if the pupil wishes).

An acrostic poem can also be made more challenging by having the first letter of the word run down the right-hand side of the page as well, or down the centre of the poem.

Generally, an acrostic poem is a light exercise to engage the pupil with the idea of writing in a set form. A pupil may select an object or event that they see in a picture and choose that word for their acrostic poem. They will observe in each line of their poem some element of what identifies the object they have chosen.

## **5. QUICK MARCH** (a sonnet)

A sonnet is a fourteen line poem, with a turn in events from the ninth line on – generally marked by a change in rhyme scheme. In the example here, the change on the ninth line is the introduction of the Norman army – and it is this that heralds the end of the indestructibility of Harold's forces

There are a few different types of sonnets (which we will not go into here, but can be easily found online) but this is an example of an Italian sonnet, with the following rhyme scheme: a/b/b/a,a/b/b/a,c/d/c/d/c/d.

Sonnets are commonly written in iambic pentameter.

## Counting beats

***Pentameter*** means that there are five beats (or stresses) to each line, which can be best measured by clapping or fingerclipping along as each line is spoken aloud. If you revisit the previous poems in Channelling Words, you will find that ARMED AND DANGEROUS and WAR CRIES both have four beats to each line; but if you clap along to THE SORRY SOLDIER you'll hear it has only three beats a line.

***Iambic*** refers to the rhythm of the sonnet, which is the sounded pattern made by the syllables in each line.

## Understanding syllables

Understanding the meaning of ***syllable*** is vital but fairly straightforward, so it is important to clarify understanding from all pupils. A syllable is a clear, distinct sound in a word. Again, this can be demonstrated by gently clapping out the sounds of a word. For instance, *table* has two sounds, *ta-ble*. *Pen* has only one clear sound. *Pencil* has two, *pen-cil*. This sounds obvious, but it is worth checking with individual pupils particularly at Key Stage 1. This can be made a little more engaging by throwing in some simple trick questions, such as: *How many syllables are there in the word 'two'?* *How many syllables are there in the word 'syllable'?* *How many syllables are there in the word 'overcomplicatedly'?*

It can also be helpful to ask which pupil has a name containing two syllables? (*Asha*) Which has a name containing 4 syllables? (*Dimitrius*)

So, an ***iambic*** meter is where each beat contains two syllables, with the stress or accent on the second syllable as in the word aROUND.

An iambic line would be: She DID/not HEAR/a WORD/he SAID/to HER  
The rhythm would be: ti-TUM/ti-TUM/ti-TUM/ti-TUM/ti-TUM

Generally, a line in iambic pentameter, as above, will contain ten syllables. There is a degree of flexibility to this, so that a rhyme can sound less stilted by strict rhythm, with the nuance of natural speech.

## **6. THINGS TO DO IN A BATTLEFIELD** (a list poem)

A list poem does not have to rhyme or have a regular rhythm. It is wonderfully liberating compared to an Italian sonnet, and far more to do

with the power of the imagination, or memory, or observation, linking separate images by a theme, so that they resonate with each other. It is ideal as a group poem, but can also be turned by more advanced pupils into a more structured poem.

## **7. MYSTERY VESSEL**

**(a puzzle poem)**

A puzzle poem is a helpful way for pupils to demonstrate their understanding of an object or subject. Like the list poem, it does not have to rhyme or have a regular structure, the important element is that it feeds the reader or listener enough information for them to guess what is being described. This can be fun for the individual pupil to read in front of the class as a game in which they must guess the right answer. It is a very natural way for pupils to begin practising their reading aloud skills.

## **8. JUMBO**

**(a kenning)**

The kenning comes from Old English and Norse poetry and is a descriptive expression instead of the actual name of a person or thing. Generally, it mixes two words together to describe something.

Some popular examples of kennings are

- the ocean as a 'whale road'
- a teacher is an 'exam setter'
- a parent is a 'meal maker'
- a dog is a 'cat chaser'
- a friend is a 'secret sharer'

Poems made from kennings do not need to rhyme, but as many kennings end in the letters 'er' they will often rhyme all on their own accord. As such, they can be a perfect introduction to pupils learning to develop their rhyming skills.

## 9. SERIOUS SPORT

### (a haiku sequence)

The haiku was originally a Japanese form, celebrating or exploring seasons, but is now more commonly used to capture a simple feeling or a single moment. They work as a type of snapshot of a far bigger event. For this reason, haiku are often presented in a sequence, giving a broader representation of the bigger picture.

But a perfect haiku can exist all on its own, in the simple three line form:

The first line consists of five syllables

The second line consists of seven syllables

The third line consists of five syllables

Haiku are deliberately undecorative, and generally do not make use of poetic tools such as metaphor, alliteration and rhyme.

## 10. BATTLE RAP

### (a rap)

Rap is a form of poetry that is meant to be heard rather than read. It is linguistically complex, and offers a more flexible rhyming and rhythmic structure and is vocalised to fit over a consistent beat.

It often uses slang language and can take the form of extreme boasting or throwing insults.

Because of this, it employs the poetic tools of metaphor, rhyme, half-rhyme, and a sophisticated, instinctive expression of meter.

Rap packs as many clever rhymes into its lines as possible, and so may look unwieldy on the page, with its irregular line lengths and unpredictable line-breaks. But to the ear, it sounds neat and slick.

### Half Rhymes

Half-rhymes are particularly popular where there may be multiple rhymes in a single line (this is called *internal* rhyme, as opposed to rhymes that only exist at the end of a line.) There are two types of half-rhyme:

Consonance: words where the consonants rhyme, but the vowels do not, such as *boat* and *beat* or *suit* and *seat*.

**Assonance**: words where the vowels rhyme, but the consonants do not, such as *seat* and *beak* or *purple* and *turtle*.

A poetic device often used in conjunction with half rhyme is:

**Alliteration**: words which begin with the same sound. Some people wrongly describe alliteration as words which begin with the same letter. *Physical people* is *not* an example of alliteration. *Physical Femi* is. So is *Fit Femi*. Consonance often incorporates alliteration as in the examples of consonance above. A quick exercise developing understanding of alliteration is to ask the pupils to introduce themselves with an alliterative description – *Jolly Joe*, *Adorable Adeola*, etc.

Depending on the learning skills of the class, the teacher may or may not wish to teach the words *consonance* and *assonance*, but the examples are worth giving, as half-rhymes are a valuable alliterative tool of performance poetry, and should be encouraged when pupils are writing their own poems. If a pupil has written *Fred got a wonderful boat* they can then be encouraged to write a second draft of the line, making use of poetic devices such as *alliteration* or *half rhyme*. Professional poets always redraft their poems in order to turn a good poem into a great poem. If the pupil redrafts the above line using *alliteration* and *consonance* they may end up with *Bert bought a beautiful boat*.

### **Rhythm games**

Here are some gentle exercises to help pupils gain confidence in understanding and working with rhythm.

### **Copy simple clapping rhythms**

The teacher can begin simply, by clapping three single counts, which the class copies. After a few turns, the clapping can become more rhythm based, so seven claps would follow the seven syllables of *clappity clappity clap*. Once the class is used to this, solo pupils can lead the clapping, for others to copy.

One variation is to add a clap of five syllables, to the same rhythm as the words *Don't Clap This One Back*. This rhythm should not be copied, but met with total silence (instead of clapping, pupils can hold their hands out wide, palms up). This develops the class listening skills.

It is often easier for a pupil to write rhythmically if they have developed an instinct for it, rather than having to rely on formal counting. Copying a rhythm by ear is the best way of building up rhythmic skills.

### Eight-beat body warm-up

The teacher begins by clapping out four beats, one on each thigh, one on each shoulder, for the class to copy. Using different parts of the body, the teacher can build this into eight beats, ie: 2 claps on the thigh, 2 hand claps, 2 on the chest or ribs, 1 tap on the head, 1 finger click with hand above the head. The teacher can accompany this by verbally counting from 1 to 8 in a regular time. Any of these percussive beats can be missed out, and replaced with a silent count, signified with a silent gesture, creating an empty space. The teacher can vary this to create different patterns for the class to copy. Individual pupils can devise their own pattern for others to copy.

The exercise below shows that different combinations of syllables can sit on top of a regular pattern of four beats. The teacher may choose poems that have a regular rhythm to demonstrate this, by inviting the class to clap along while a poem is being read (the teacher may wish to practice this beforehand.)

For example (from *Boxed In* by Steve Tasane):

The *only* time I *laugh* is when *You've Been Framed*

(clap) (clap) (clap) (clap)

*Satellite dishes* are replacing my *brains*

(clap) (clap) (clap) (clap)

*Quizzes, soaps* and *celebrity games*

(claps) (clap) (clap) (clap)

*Fifty-seven channels* and they're *all the same*

(clap) (clap) (clap) (clap)

Practice clapping on the syllables that are in italics.

### Rhythm Name Game

This involves two beats tapped on the thighs followed by two finger clicks, to a silent count of 1, 2, 3, 4, and repeated. Use the two finger clicks to say your name. Demonstrate how a name with two syllables falls tidily on the two beats; how a name with one syllable has its single sound stretched out across the two beats; how a name with three syllables will have the middle syllable sit between the two beats. Demonstrate this using names of pupils in the class. In a circle, all the class taps out the beat, and says everybody's name in turn, around the circle during the finger clicks.

Variations on this include: pupils say their names individually; each pupil says the name of the person to their left; or where each pupil says the name of anybody else in the circle, who must then say somebody

else's name, without breaking the rhythm.

### **Practice By Performing In A Group**

A helpful starting exercise is to perform one of Steve's poems in a small group. Performing poems as a small group (2 - 6 pupils) can help build confidence and enable those pupils with weaker reading skills to memorise small segments of poetry. It also helps them not to feel under pressure, as responsibility for a good performance is spread evenly among the team.

There are a number of options to be explored in performing a poem as a team:

Pupils can take turns to read single lines

Pupils can read alternate lines in pairs

Pupils can join in on the last word of a line

Pupils can add one voice at a time, building to a dramatic crescendo

Pupils not reading a line can perform actions, or choreography, to accompany the line

If the poem has a repeated phrase, or hook, all the team can join in on this

If the poem has different voices or points of view, this can be dramatised more effectively as a team

The team can experiment, and perform their poem using whatever combination of voices they prefer

### **Doing It Deliberately Wrong**

It is helpful – and fun – to demonstrate how one performs badly. The teacher, or poet would be introduced, to applause from the class, and do the following:

First, shuffle their notes while still at their desk, delaying arrival on stage

Make no introduction but launch straight into the poem

Stand to the side of the stage, rather than in the centre

Make no eye contact with the audience

Cover face with paper or hands

Mumble

Say the words too fast

Fidget (with tie, with coins in pocket, shaking leg)

Make a mistake and apologise loudly and at length

Make a mistake AGAIN and apologise loudly and at length

Begin to leave the stage while still reading the last line

(Note: making all the above mistakes can require stage skills as much as demonstrating a good performance. It may be helpful for the teacher

to practise this beforehand)

The teacher can then ask the class to identify each of the ‘mistakes’, emphasising their positive opposites:

Always greet the audience in one way or another

Be prepared

Stand centre stage

Maintain calm, solid body language

Take plenty of time with the words, pausing between phrases, giving yourself time to breathe, and chance for the audience to digest the lines

NEVER apologise for a mistake, it just gives it extra attention. Rectify the mistake, and move on.

The LAST line is one of the most important and must be delivered with extra confidence

It is good manners to wait and receive applause

### Feedback session

Once the class has absorbed these tips and had plenty of rehearsal time, each performer or group then takes the stage with their poem. After they have finished, they remain on stage while the class first gives feedback on all the things the performers did WELL; then they offer ways in which the performance can be IMPROVED. The emphasis here is on PRAISE and helpful feedback, rather than putting people down. It is helpful if the teacher takes notes, and ensures full feedback is given, preferably guiding the class with questions like, “What did we think of their body language?”

After everyone has had their turn, the process is repeated, so the poets get chance to improve on their performance, this time without feedback, only applause.

### The Poetry Slam (or Rap Battle)

A slam is a light-hearted challenge that involves poets or teams competing against each other to see who can score the highest points.

I would suggest this involves two teams (the Saxons and Normans most obviously) with each poet or group being scored out of ten by a panel of judges, the winning team having the highest overall score.

If a teacher has concerns about the confidence of pupils being affected by the scoring process, the judges could score secretly, only announcing the winners at the end.

A more inventive and celebratory way of praising pupils’ efforts, and confidence-building, is to invent special awards for individual pupils,

such as “Most Unique Idea”, “Most Standout Performance”, “Best Effort” etc. This way, teachers can reward pupils who may not have scored highly out of ten.

The main point to remember is that a Poetry Slam is a means to celebrate creativity. It is more sport than war. Audience members should be encouraged to clap and cheer and whoop!

Poetry is its own reward! Everybody wins.