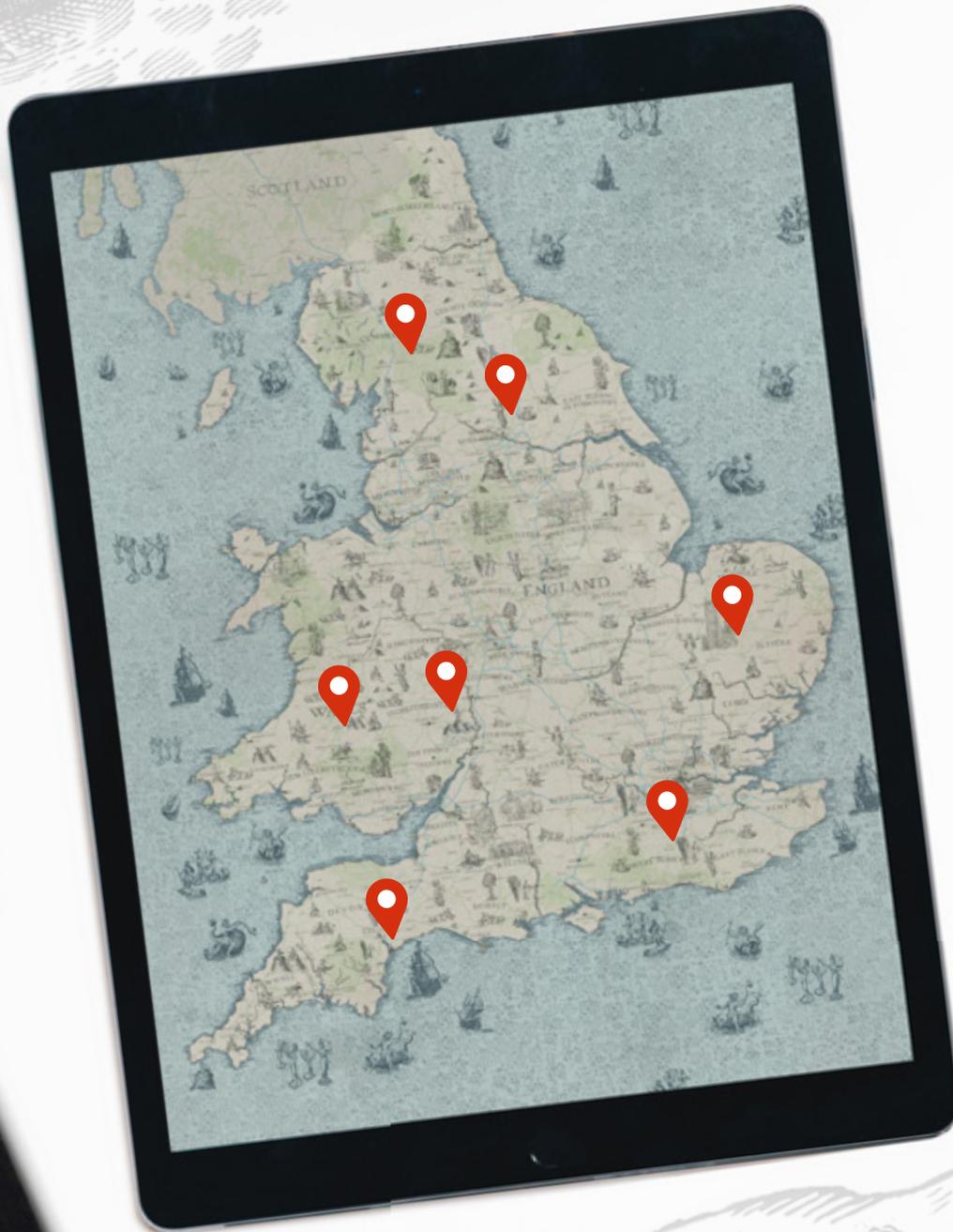
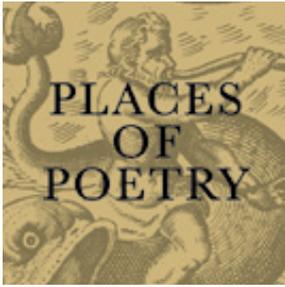


PLACES OF POETRY



TOOLKIT 1: FOR HERITAGE AND ARTS ORGANISATIONS



Places of Poetry is a community arts project, centred on a newly designed digital map of England and Wales. Over Summer 2019, writers of every level from across the country will be invited to write new poems of place, heritage and identity, and pin them to the map. Places of Poetry will help us reflect on our national and cultural identities, and celebrate the diversity, heritage and personalities of place.

This toolkit – produced by The Poetry Society – is designed for heritage and arts organisations that want to connect with Places of Poetry. It supports education, participation and interpretation staff in creating activities that will produce new poems – about your local sites – for the Places of Poetry map.

INTRODUCTION

Poetry serves as a marker, a record of thoughts, feelings and experience from a particular time and place. Poetry connects us to our heritage and can be a way of placing ourselves in the world – helping us establish our own position and form a deeper connection with the places we visit.

People might mark a visit to a museum, gallery or area of interest by buying a souvenir, sending a postcard, taking a picture, or sharing on social media.

Writing a poem could result in something even more long-lasting and meaningful to mark a visit. Writing requires a certain reflection. Poetry can reach beyond visual description or factual knowledge and connect visitors more deeply to the subject of place through personal understanding and appreciation.

Many writers and poets over the centuries have been inspired to write about place. Poets like William Blake, John Clare, Thomas Hardy, Christina Rossetti and T S Eliot famously mapped parts of England in their poetry and used place as a way of exploring their own heritage and issues that were important to them; religion, politics, freedom, grief, love and devotion.

A poet perhaps most associated with writing about place in the 18th Century was William Wordsworth. In his poem ‘Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798’ Wordsworth begins with description, contemplating the ‘beauteous forms’ of the landscape but then engages with his

own memories to reflect on how his view has altered as he has grown older, deepening his understanding of his own place in the world.

*For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh, nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue.*

‘An Arundel Tomb’ by Philip Larkin (1922-1985) was inspired by a visit to Chichester Cathedral where the poet came across a table tomb with a pair of medieval stone effigies, lying down, holding hands. The poem begins with a description:

*Side by side, their faces blurred,
The earl and countess lie in stone,
Their proper habits vaguely shown*

But through the poem Larkin progresses from observation to thought, and eventually leaves behind the stone effigies to powerfully foreground his own philosophy:

*Time has transfigured them into
Untruth. The stone fidelity
They hardly meant has come to be
Their final blazon, and to prove
Our almost-instinct almost true:
What will survive of us is love.*

POEMS IN YOUR VENUE ***– SOME QUICK IDEAS***

- Look for poems that have particular relevance to your place or organisation by searching a keyword or subject (eg. 'coal mining', 'farming and agriculture', 'Roman history', 'pre-historic', 'library') on one of the following poetry search websites:
www.poetryfoundation.org
www.poets.org
www.poemhunter.com
- Putting out-of-copyright poems on display where your visitors and / or staff can see them, in the café or canteen is a good way of inspiring people to think about poetry in relation to place and encouraging them to have a go themselves. (If you want to feature contemporary poems, contact the copyright holder to ask for permission – a good place to start is the poem's publisher).
- Are there poems you can find which speak to particular exhibits or aspects of your exhibition? Can you display them alongside more traditional interpretation signage?
- Put the call out for poets to write new poems about your site or collections. You could do this as a schools project, an open competition or a formal commission. If it's the latter option, you will need to pay the poets for their work – contact info@poetrysociety.org.uk if you would like guidance about commissioning.
- There will be an Arts-Council supported literature development agency in your region (eg New Writing North, Writing East Midlands, Writing West Midlands, The National Writing Centre (based in Norwich), Literature Works (based in the South West). They should also be able to connect you with local poetry-related programming.
- What about a live poetry reading event to share all the work that has been produced from your activities?

The more detailed activities on the following pages are designed to be adapted for all settings, ages and abilities of writer, and the suggestions will work as both guided or self-guided activities.



ACTIVITY 1
PICTURING THE PLACE
– FOR INDIVIDUAL VISITORS

Materials needed:

- Paper (or printed templates)
- Pens
- Something to lean on

Let's begin with the senses.

Just like photography or painting, a poem can create a picture of place through words. Alongside famous painters like Turner, Ruskin and Royle, Wordsworth was moved to set down his impressions of Bolton Abbey, a 12th century Augustinian monastery in the Yorkshire Dales, in 'The White Doe of Rylstone' (1807). This long narrative poem containing both historical and legendary subject matter begins:

*From Bolton's old monastic tower
The bells ring loud with gladsome power;
The sun shines bright; the fields are gay
With people in their best array
Of stole and doublet, hood and scarf,
Along the banks of crystal Wharf,
Through the vale retired and lowly.
Trooping to that summons holy.
And, up among the moorlands, see
What sprinklings of blithe company!
Of lasses and of shepherd grooms,
That down the steep hills force their way
Like cattle through the budding brooms;
Path, or no path, what care they?
And thus in joyous mood they hie
To Bolton's mouldering Priory.*

A poem can work very simply to provide an impression of being in a place, not just by factual description but by evoking its sense. The key to making a good poem is finding words that relate well to our sense of things – what we can see, hear, taste, touch, smell, feel.

One easy, immediate and effective way of gathering such words and ideas is to invite your visitors to note down four simple impressions during or at the end of their visit. You could provide a short questionnaire or template for doing so:

1. One thing I particularly noticed seeing on my visit today was (at Bolton Abbey, Wordsworth might have answered: Sunshine, people dressed up)
2. One thing I particularly noticed hearing on my visit today was (Wordsworth might have said: Bells ringing loudly)
3. One thing I particularly notice about the smells or tastes of this place is (Wordsworth noticed: Broom budding on the steep hill)
4. An image or word that describes how this place makes me feel is (Wordsworth's word for the general mood was: Joyous)

Their responses could instantly form a four-line portrait poem.

*Sunshine, people dressed up
Bells ringing loudly
Broom budding on the steep hill
Joyous*



Don't forget to post
your poem on the
Places of Poetry map.
We'd love to see how
you get on!

ACTIVITY 2

PICTURING THE PLACE
– FOR GROUP VISITS

Here's a similar exercise to carry out with a group of about 10 – 20 participants of any age. It takes around 30 minutes.

Materials needed:

- Large pieces of paper for paired writing - A3 is fine
- Felt tip pens
- Scissors
- Large floor or table space for assembling poem

First, give everyone a few moments to think of the place they are in or have just visited. They can look around them or try to recall specific details from their visit – what did they see, hear, learn, notice or remember most? How did the experience make them feel?

Then divide into pairs. One tells the other a few things about their experience whilst their partner acts as scribe and writes it down on a large piece of paper. The person telling then becomes the scribe for the other. The ideas should all be written on the same side of the paper. When done, use scissors to cut out all the ideas from the single large sheet so they can be considered as separate bits of writing.

From all they have generated together the pair should choose three - not 3 each, but 3 pieces of writing between them. They should base their choice on what they think constitutes an interesting idea or evocative word or phrase. Gather the chosen bits from each pair into a collected pile. If the group has 10 participants, there will be 15 pieces of writing in total, three from each pair.

The pile constitutes the lines/words that will make up the group poem, a poem which will contain elements of everyone's experience of the place. The choosing of the order can be done collectively as a group, arranging the poem by determining, according to the edict given by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the 'best words in the best order'. Feel free to add in a few linking words if it makes sense to do so.

So, say for example that the place in question is a site with Roman artefacts, and these were the 15 pieces of writing selected from everyone's work in pairs:

shoe worn by soldier 2000 yrs ago

deciphering a message to the gods

standing on the wall the wind nearly blew me over

Castlecary the Fort on the Antonine Roman Wall

I feel ignorant children running around being Romans

soldiers tile arch, facing stone, putlog holes

one helmet handle discovered grey stone walls, green fields

amulet bead they used toilets, baths and cooked in pots

Ancient imagine building a wall that lasts as long as that?

makes me feel a little queasy

I wonder who'll dig us up in 2000 years

This could result in the following poem which has been lineated in quatrains (the words in blue are optional additions):

*Children running around being soldiers at the Fort
on the Roman Wall. They are naming things, like tile arch,
facing stone, putlog holes. Compared to them, I feel ignorant.
Ancient. Imagine building a wall that lasts as long as that?*

*Grey stone walls and green fields – the wind nearly
blew me over, stood on the wall with our feet placed
next to the shoe worn by a soldier over 2000 years ago.
Only one helmet handle was ever discovered.*

*'They took baths, used toilets and cooked
in pots, just like us,' the children are saying
I'm busy deciphering a message to the gods,
this amulet bead smooth in my hands.*

*To be honest, all this history
makes me feel a little queasy.
I wonder who will dig us up
in 2000 years time?*

ACTIVITY 3

NAMING THE PLACE

Materials needed:

- A way of generating text suggestions
- Paper
- Pens
- Something to lean on

Names, especially place names, can be a wonderfully playful way to generate poetry. And again, this can work with individuals or groups of all ages and abilities.

The following anonymous poems are a selection of Norfolk rhymes that play affectionately with the sound of place names, local dialect and traditions to reveal a sense of identity, geographical and architectural heritage.

Norfolk Place-name Rhymes

*Caistor was a city
When Norwich was none,
And Norwich was built
of Caistor stone.
Rising was a sea-port
When Lynn was but a marsh,
Now Lynn it is a sea-port
And Rising fares the worse.
Rising was, Lynn is, and Downham shall be,
The greatest seaport of the three.*

*Gimingham, Trimingham, Knapton, Trunch,
Northrepps, Southrepps, lie all in a bunch.
When Keswick Church becomes a barn
Bromholm Abbey will be a farm.*

*Cromer crabs, Runton dabs,
Beeston babies, Sheringham ladies,
Weybourne witches, Salthouse ditches
The Blakeney people
Stand on the steeple
And crack hazel-nuts
With a five-farthing beetle.*

*Bickling flats, Aylsham fliers,
Marsham peewits, and Hevingham liars.
Denton in the dale and Arborough in the dirt,
And if you go to Homersfield, your purse will get a squirt.*

Ask your visitors to create a glossary of place names from the local area and/or the names of objects and artefacts that form part of the display in your organisation – maybe with a physical suggestion box, or via a social media campaign. You could suggest choosing names according to particular criteria.

- a. Rhyme – names that echo each other in terms of quality or sound
- b. Alliteration – names that begin with the same letter or sound
- c. Allusion – names that reference a historical, mythic, or literary person, place or event

If your staff or visitors are local to the area where your organisation is situated, you could ask them about idioms and sayings from the area to include in the glossary. Poems written in dialect with particular reference to the language and lore of the area can be a very powerful way of conveying place and heritage. For examples of this by contemporary UK poets, see work by Liz Berry, Ian MacMillan, Simon Armitage and Caleb Femi.

Who will take on the task of incorporating as many of these as possible in a poem or verse that, however silly, still conveys something of interest about the place? How will you pass on your poems to your visitors? Don't forget to pin your poem to the Places of Poetry map!

ACTIVITY 4

SPENDING TIME WITH SMALL THINGS

Materials needed:

- **Printed templates with instructions about which particular small aspects of your site or collection you might invite people to look at**
- **Pens**
- **Something to lean on**

One of the most magical aspects of poetry is the way it manages to find profound meaning in the seemingly mundane, and establish connection between apparently unrelated subjects. Far too often we regard certain aspects of our own history or culture as boring, and are not drawn to visit places we have no connection with, because we believe 'it will have nothing to do with me' or 'I will feel out of place'.

Writing a poem can be a bit like solving a difficult puzzle - searching for the right pieces; exploring different solutions; looking for short cuts; and ultimately achieving what seemed initially impossible - arriving at the 'aha' moment when everything falls into place.

The following exercise involves focusing on a seemingly small or unimportant aspect of the place you are writing about. Something incidental and on the surface rather than having been conceived as an integral part of the display. This could be anything - a loose floorboard, a smudge in the paint, a broken branch, a window, a doorway, a keyhole, a patch of grass - and use it to title your poem together with the name of the place it is part of. We have imagined a poem created from contemplation of some pre-historic heritage, but this process could work just as well for industrial, archaeological, cultural or sporting heritage.

That Small Patch of Dried Grass by the Standing Stones

Focus only on that one thing - in this case, the patch of brown grass. Allow yourself to wonder about it. How did it get so dry? Does it remind you of some other patch of grass you know? Who else might have stood here / sat here / seen this patch / known it before it was so dried and brown? How long has the grass been growing here / what has it seen?

What does it know about the place? What do you think of it? What does it think of you?

Inevitably, in thinking about the grass you will also consider its location and relationship to the place you are in, just as you are considering your own relationship to this place. How familiar or alien does the grass feel itself to be in relation to the main display? What does it know / what does it want to know? What questions can you ask of it?

Allow yourself to journey away from the thing and then come back to it. Write notes to tell it where you have been / what you have seen that it cannot. Eventually ask yourself what this thing has come to mean for you and what you might mean to it. How can you ponder, together, this place you are in. What commonality do you share now you have spent this time together?

Write your poem.



Pinning a poem to the Places of Poetry map is easy. Go to www.placesofpoetry.org.uk, click on the menu bar and follow the instructions.

Further Links and Suggestions

- Tongue and Talk: The Dialect Poets BBC R4 www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0b3m9sh
- www.birminghammail.co.uk/whats-on/arts-culture-news/liz-berry-hails-black-country-6902231
- www.theguardian.com/books/2017/aug/10/a-gurt-plan-national-poetry-day-to-celebrate-englands-local-words
- www.revisionworld.com/gcse-revision/english/poetry-gcse/studying-poetry/poems-different-cultures/non-standard-english-dialect-forms

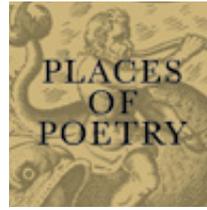
THE POETRY SOCIETY

The Poetry Society was founded in 1909 to promote ‘a more general recognition and appreciation of poetry’. Since then, it has grown into one of Britain’s most dynamic arts organisations, representing British poetry both nationally and internationally. Today it has more than 4,500 members worldwide and publishes the leading poetry magazine, The Poetry Review. With innovative education and commissioning programmes and a packed calendar of performances, readings and competitions, The Poetry Society champions poetry for all ages.

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Places of Poetry is a project led by poet Paul Farley and the academic Andrew McRae, from the Universities of Lancaster and Exeter, partnered by Ordnance Survey and The Poetry Society. It is generously funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council England.

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