

The Watford Festival

OF MUSIC, SPEECH AND DRAMA

SET POETRY 2024

SO - Reception year & under

On the Beach

They buried their dad in the golden sands, buried his legs, buried his hands, buried his body and buried his toes and left just his face and a very red nose.

Marian Swinger

The Acrobats

I'll swing
By my ankles,
She'll cling
To your knees
As you hang
By your nose
From a high-up
Trapeze.
But just one thing, please,
As we float through the breeze—
Don't sneeze.

Shel Silverstein

Things to Do If You Are the Rain

Be gentle.

Hide the edges of buildings.

Plip, plop in puddles.

Tap, tap, tap against the rooftops.

Sing your very own song!

Make the grass green.

Make the world smell special.

Race away on a gray cloud.

Sign your name with a rainbow.

Bobbi Katz



Listening to the Trees

And the birch says
it's about dancing and colour
and the rowan says
it's about berries and birds
and the willow says
it's about shape and shelter
and the hazel says
it's about love and lichen
and the aspen says
it's about growth and the wind
but I say it's about
listening to the trees.

Mandy Haggith

Where Go the Boats?

Dark brown is the river, Golden is the sand. It flows along for ever, With trees on either hand.

Green leaves a-floating, Castles of the foam, Boats of mine a-boating -Where will all come home?

On goes the river And out past the mill, Away down the valley, Away down the hill.

Away down the river, A hundred miles or more, Other little children Shall bring my boats ashore.

Robert Louis Stevenson

My Card for Father's Day

This is the card that I've made for my dad. It's sticky with glue... but it's not too bad.

I cut out this ship and then stuck it in And I drew this shark with a great big fin.

Then I've written as neatly as I can "With love to my dad. He's the world's best man!"

This is the card that I'll give to my dad. It's sticky with glue... but it's not too bad.

Wes Magee



Just a Skin Thing

This is the skin That I've grown up in. I've filled every part And look pretty smart. It starts at my head, Reaches down to my feet, It stretches so I can Sit down on a seat. It's got a few freckles That others can see, And fingerprint markings To prove that I'm me. Skin comes in all sizes And colours and shades, And proves, without doubt, We're all brilliantly made!

Coral Rumble

Yuck

Jam all over her fingers, Pastry in her hair, Fruit juice dribbling down her chin And custard everywhere.

Playdough in her fingernails, Mud between her toes, And something much much nastier Running from her nose.

But none of that would bother me If it weren't for this:

My sister's heading this way fast —
And it's me she wants to kiss!

Paul Rogers

Please, Noah!

Tortoise

I'm slow, Noah, slow. Don't put me near the hare, the horse's hoof, the elephant. I fear... the python, Noah; his curling tongue is long enough to pierce my home. Let me share my room with mole, light-footed wren or snail; he cannot stamp or run. Best of all, just let me be alone.

Judith Nicholls

Squirrel

Grey squirrel

Small beast Storing up a winter's feast, Hides a hundred nuts at least.

Nook and cranny stocked with seed Tucked away for winter's need. Acorns stuck in hole and crack. Will he ever get them back?

When the snow is piled up high And the year is at December, Can he really still remember Where he hid them in September?

I have watched him from my window And he always seems to know Where the food he hid is waiting Buried deep beneath the snow.

And I wonder
(Do you wonder?)
How he knows where he must go.

Mary Ann Hoberman

The Midnight Train to Nowhere

Brambles creep over the platform. The station is silent and hushed. The signals are bent and broken. The tracks are covered in rust.

But people say that on windy nights When owls are sweeping low, From deep inside the tunnel An eerie whistle blows.

And the smell of hot smoke fills the air And they hear the hiss of steam, As the Midnight Train to Nowhere Goes thundering through their dreams.



Summer Goes

Summer goes, summer goes Like the sand between my toes When the waves go out. That's how summer pulls away, Leaves me standing here today, Waiting for the school bus.

Summer brought, summer brought All the frogs that I have caught, Frogging at the pond, Hot dogs, flowers, shells and rocks, Postcards in my postcard box—Places far away.

Summer took, Summer took All the lessons in my book, Blew them far away. I forgot the things I knew— Arithmetic and spelling too, Never thought about them.

Summer's gone, summer's gone— Fall and winter coming on, Frosty in the morning. Here's the school bus right on time. I'm not really sad that I'm Going back to school.

Russell Hoban

Norman the Zebra

Norman, a zebra at the zoo, Escaped and ran to Waterloo And caused a lot of consternation In the rush hour, at the station.

He had an awful lot of fun Chasing folk on Platform One, And then he ran to Regent's Park And hid there until it was dark, And thought of his keeper, Mr Prout, How cross he'd be, that he'd got out So he tiptoes to the big zoo gate And found he'd got there just too late. Poor Norman had a little weep And lay down in the road to sleep And woke up early from his rest With people walking on his chest. And someone said, "I think that's new, A zebra crossing by the zoo." And with a snort of indignation, He cried, "I've had enough of that. How dare you use me as a mat. I'm going straight home to the zoo." He was just in time for breakfast too.

Jeremy Lloyd

Littlemouse

Light of day going,
Harvest moon glowing,
People beginning to snore,
Tawny owl calling,
Dead of night falling,
Littlemouse opening her door.

Scrabbling and tripping,
Sliding and slipping,
Over the ruts of the plough,
Under the field gate,
Mustn't arrive late,
Littlemouse hurrying now.

Into a clearing,
All the birds cheering,
Woodpecker blowing a horn,
Nightingale fluting,
Blackbird toot-tooting,
Littlemouse dancing till dawn.

Soon comes the morning,
No time for yawning,
Home again Littlemouse creeps,
Over the furrow,
Back to her burrow.
Into bed. Littlemouse sleeps.

Richard Edwards

S4 - School Year 4



Silk-moth Monitor

In our classroom we have thirty-three children, one teacher and fifty-two Chinese silk-moths.

I am the Chinese silk-moth monitor.

Each day
I have to check the oak leaves
and decide whether to replace them,
so that the Chinese silk-moths,
which are at the second stage
of their development—
that is to say, caterpillars—
can enjoy a healthy diet.

Each day
I have to record their progress,
so I have put a spot
on the one I call Leroy,
a typical specimen, and—
each day—
I measure him.
This can take some time.
He is a fast mover.

Friday is cleaning-out day.
This is when I give
every caterpillar
the chance to exercise properly.
Crawling along my finger
provides the challenge
of a different environment.

I could have been the dinner-register monitor, But I prefer working with animals.

June Crebbin



Truth

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can also hurt me. Stones and sticks break only skin, while words are ghosts that haunt me.

Slant and curved the word-swords fall to pierce and stick inside me. Bats and bricks may ache through bones, but words can mortify me.

Pain from words has left its scar on mind and heart that's tender. Cuts and bruises now have healed; it's words that I remember.

Barrie Wade

Suzie's New Dog

Your dog? What dog? You mean it?—that! I was about to leave a note Pinned to a fish to warn my cat To watch for a mouse in an overcoat!

So that's a dog! Is it any breed That anyone ever knew — or guessed? Oh, a Flea Terrier! Yes indeed. Well now, I am impressed!

I guess no robber will try your house Or even cut through your yard. Not when he knows you have a mouse — I mean a dog — like that on guard!

You have to go? I'm glad you came! I don't see a thing like that Just every day. Does it have a name? Fang, eh? Well, I must warn my cat.

John Ciardi

Spring

I'm shouting I'm singing I'm swinging through trees I'm winging sky-high With the buzzing black bees. I'm the sun I'm the moon I'm the dew on the rose. I'm a rabbit Whose habit Is twitching his nose. I'm lively I'm lovely I'm kicking my heels. I'm crying, "Come dance" to the freshwater eels. I'm racing through meadows Without any coat I'm a gamboling lamb I'm a light leaping goat I'm a bud I'm a bloom I'm a dove on the wing. I'm running on rooftops And welcoming spring!

Karla Kuskin

The Thin Prison

S6 - School Year 6



Hold the pen close to your ear. Listen — can you hear them? Words burning as a flame, Words glittering like a tear,

Locked, all locked in the slim pen. They are crying for freedom. And you can release them, Set them running from prison.

Himalayas, balloons, Captain Cook, Kites, red brick, London Town, Sequins, cricket bats, large brown Boots, lions and lemonade — look,

I've just let them out!
Pick up your pen, and start,
Think of the things you know — then
Let the words dance from your pen.

Leslie Norris

BED!

When it is time to go to bed my mum says:

'BED!'

I say:

'Please can I stay up until this film finishes?'

'What time does it finish?'
my mum says.

'Ten o'clock,' I say.

'No way,' my mum says.

'Oh can't I stay up for five minutes?'

'NO.'

'Please.'

'NO!'

'Oh... can't I read in bed?'

'NO!'

'Please.'

'Come here, girl... You are getting on my nerves If you are not in that bed by the time I count to...'

I walk slowly up the stairs my brother is laughing away. Then my mum starts shouting again. This time at my brother.

Pole-Star

Polaris

I am the Star of mariners On the sea. Nelson and Drake and Shackleton Sailed by me.

I am the guide of adventurers Through the dark. Marco Polo my namesake Knew my mark.

All who travelled the Northern Hemisphere, Powder monkey and admiral, Privateer,

Scott, Paul Jones and Frobisher, Captain Cook, Sindbad and Long John Silver And James Hook,

Nansen, Raleigh, Columbus Were my friends. I beheld their beginnings And their ends.

I am the heaven-set steersman Of the deep, All ships and all sea-farers In my keep.

Eleanor Farjeon



Ghost in the Garden

The ghost in the garden Cracks twigs as she treads Shuffles the leaves But isn't there

The ghost in the garden
Snaps back the brambles
So they spring against my legs
But isn't there

Draws spiders' webs across my face Breathes mist on my cheek Whispers with bird-breath down my ear But isn't there

Tosses raindrops down from branches Splashes the pond Traces a face in it That isn't mine

Moves shadows underneath the trees Too tall, too thin, too tiny to be me

Spreads bindweed out to catch me Flutters wild wings about my head Tugs at my hair But isn't there

And when I look
There's only the bend of grass
Where her running feet
Have smudged the dew

And there's only the sigh
Of her laughter
Trickling
Like
Moonlight
On
Wet
Weeds.

Berlie Doherty

A Poem to be Spoken Silently

It was so silent that I heard my thoughts rustle like leaves in a paper bag...

It was so peaceful that I heard the trees ease off their coats of bark...

It was so still that I heard the paving stones groan as they muscled for space...

It was so silent that I heard a page of this book whisper to its neighbour, 'Look he's peering at us again...'

It was so still that I felt a raindrop grin as it tickled the window's pane...

It was so calm that I sensed a smile crack the face of a stranger...

It was so quiet that I heard the morning earth roll over in its sleep and doze for five minutes more...

Pie Corbett



Practising

One and two and three and four, Practising is SUCH a bore! Five and six and seven and eight, Scales are things I simply hate!

I must ask my teacher whether I could use both hands together; But the answer's sure to be, "Practise hard, and then we'll see."

One and two and three and four, There's my little friend next door, Calling to me from the gate! Five and six and seven and eight.

Wish I could go out to play; But I know I've got to stay Practising, until I see That the clock says half-past three.

A thrush upon the sill has hopped; I'm quite, quite sure that clock has stopped! One and two and one, two, three, It simply MUST be time for tea.

Wonder if there's chocolate cake! Scales DO make your fingers ache. Think my birthday's getting near; It's a Saturday this year.

And Dad says if I'm very good (That, of course, is understood) He will take me to the Zoo! One and two and one and two.

One and two and one, two, three, Does the clock say half-past three? Yes, at last! Hip-pip-hurray! No more silly scales today!

Dorothy Gray



Night Watch

The moon trudged up the wood.

I waited by the wall till everything
was touched with blue, from shadows dark as ink
to sheet-white grass, my clothes too, and my hands,
this time, this one night.

When further and higher up I suddenly heard steps — stone against stone, a slither. And again, stone ground on stone again. Heavy. And again — Hooves? Feet? Paws? Monster's? Or murderer's?

Which way were they going? Coming? I strained to tell, a bramble-coil hiding me. No other sound. Which way? This way yet? Too scared to move at all I turned into a tree, a dead tree playing statues with the moon.

Whose steps were up there jostling the stones? They never came or left. Under a little cliff by day I found them out. Those feet were never legged — I found water, playing at life in the drips of a falling streamlet, marking time.

That night, the moon full — held still by that cold trick, what did I miss?

Libby Houston

The Tom-Cat

At midnight in the alley A Tom-cat comes to wail, And he chants the hate of a million years As he swings his snaky tail.

Malevolent, bony, brindled, Tiger and devil and bard, His eyes are coals from the middle of Hell And his heart is black and hard.

He twists and crouches and capers And bares his curved sharp claws, And he sings to the stars of the jungle nights, Ere cities were, or laws.

Beast from a world primeval, He and his leaping clan, When the blotched red moon leers over the roofs, Give voice to their scorn of man.

He will lie on a rug tomorrow And lick his silky fur, And veil the brute in his yellow eyes And play he's tame, and purr.

But at midnight in the alley He will crouch again and wail, And beat the time for his demon's song, With the swing of his demon's tail.

Don Marquis



As I Watch

At the back of Maths while the rest of the class tackle graphs Jack and Matt pass a note back and forth and cackle laughs. Dominique is doing this thing with her feet, making both her heels squeak on the leg of her seat Morgan is awkwardly trying to yawn caught between feeling naughty and boredom Alissa and Kirstie sit earnestly working in search of a word of approval from Sir Gemma and Tristan pretend that they're listening nodding in sync to prove that they've heard Abdul is scribbling circles in curves filling his page with whirlpools of o's Dylan's pretending he's scratching his forehead secretly digging his thumb up his nose Famida's inspecting her nails like a surgeon Arif is sneakily checking his phone Dominic's holding his head like it's hurting Abe is just slumped like a lump of old stone And I sit, watching, drinking them in making up rhymes for the lives that they live Cos that's my thing, sitting to the side, silently rhyming capturing time with each blink of my eyelids recording it all in a verse for just me on my own in my head till the bell sets us free and as we walk out I give my words marks out of ten then head straight to next lesson where it all starts again.

Steven Camden



Solitude

Laugh, and the world laughs with you; Weep, and you weep alone; For the sad old earth must borrow its mirth, But has trouble enough of its own. Sing, and the hills will answer; Sigh, it is lost on the air; The echoes bound to a joyful sound, But shrink from voicing care.

Rejoice, and men will seek you;
Grieve, and they turn and go;
They want full measure of all your pleasure,
But they do not need your woe.
Be glad, and your friends are many;
Be sad, and you lose them all,—
There are none to decline your nectared wine,
But alone you must drink life's gall.

Feast, and your halls are crowded;
Fast, and the world goes by.
Succeed and give, and it helps you live,
But no man can help you die.
There is room in the halls of pleasure
For a large and lordly train,
But one by one we must all file on
Through the narrow aisles of pain.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Trees in the Storm

The trees cling to the earth with tired fingers. No matter how the sky tugs at them they cling and cling.
They wrap their roots around the rabbit's warren, The badger's holt, the mole's tunnel, and cling and cling, and won't let go no matter what.
They are afraid of being torn free and hurled, root and branch, into the black soup of the sky.

Most things cling to the earth,
Most things that are not balloons
or birds or dandelion seeds,
or bits of paper or smoke,
or kites or clouds,
cling to the earth.
Even shadows cling to the earth.
Stones do it best,
they are the experts.

But among living things it is the trees, swaying and rattling their heads, branches snapping like bones, each dishevelled twig wearing its necklaces of rain, it is the trees that fight so fiercely against the wild storm, that cling and cling, as if to life, as if never to give up.

Brian Patten



First Art Lesson

My new paintbox's shining black lacquer lid divided neatly into three oblong sections reflects my funny face, the art room windows white with autumn clouds and flecked with rain.

When I open it, the scented white enamel dazzles. Inside, pure colours are displayed like blocks of a bulb-grower's beds of flowers, toy spectrum in china tubs and tin tubes, a cubist rainbow.

From my jam jar filled with fresh water at the sink I pour a little liquid into each depression; take the brush of silky camel hair; wet its plumpness for the first time, and the last, between my lips.

Then dip its fine, dark tip into the water tanks, and into the juicy wells of Crimson Lake, Gamboge, Sienna, Peacock Blue, Burnt Ochre, Emerald, Olive, Terracotta, Vermilion, Umber, Cadmium, Indigo, Intense Black.

Damp the paper. From the top edge, with sleek, loaded brush, begin to release the first phantom of a pale-blue wash.

James Kirkup



Naming of Parts

Today we have naming of parts. Yesterday We had daily cleaning. And tomorrow morning, We shall have what to do after firing. But today, Today we have naming of parts. Japonica Glistens like coral in all of the neighbouring gardens, And today we have naming of parts.

This is the lower sling swivel. And this Is the upper sling swivel, whose use you will see, When you are given your slings. And this is the piling swivel, Which in your case you have not got. The branches Hold in the gardens their silent, eloquent gestures, Which in our case we have not got.

This is the safety-catch, which is always released With an easy flick of the thumb. And please do not let me See anyone using his finger. You can do it quite easy If you have any strength in your thumb. The blossoms Are fragile and motionless, never letting anyone see Any of them using their finger.

And this you can see is the bolt. The purpose of this Is to open the breech, as you see. We can slide it Rapidly backwards and forwards; we call this Easing the spring. And rapidly backwards and forwards The early bees are assaulting and fumbling the flowers: They call it easing the Spring.

They call it easing the Spring. It is perfectly easy
If you have any strength in your thumb; like the bolt,
And the breech, and the cocking piece, and the point of balance,
Which in our case we have not got; and the almond-blossom
Silent in all of the gardens and the bees going backwards and forwards,
For today we have naming of parts.

Henry Reed



Warning

When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves
And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.
I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired
And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells
And run my stick along the public railings
And make up for the sobriety of my youth.
I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
And pick the flowers in other people's gardens
And learn to spit.

You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat And eat three pounds of sausages at a go Or only bread and pickle for a week And hoard pens and pencils and beermats and things in boxes.

But now we must have clothes that keep us dry And pay our rent and not swear in the street And set a good example for the children. We must have friends to dinner and read the papers.

But maybe I ought to practise a little now? So people who know me are not too shocked and surprised When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple.

Jenny Joseph

The New Colossus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Emma Lazarus

SO — Reception Year and Under		
On the Beach — Marian Swinger	LAMDA Verse & Prose volume 18	LAMDA, 2014
The Acrobats — Shel Silverstein	Where the Sidewalk Ends	Harper Collins, 2014
Things to Do If You Are the Rain — Bobbi Katz	Poetry from A to Z: a Guide for Young Writers	Simon & Schuster, 1994
S1 — School Year 1		
Listening to the Trees — Mandy Haggith	The Thing that Mattered Most: Scottish poems for children	Scottish Poetry Library, 2006
My Card for Father's Day — Wes Magee	LAMDA Verse & Prose volume 18	LAMDA, 2014
Where Go the Boats — Robert Louis Stevenson	https://allpoetry.com/Where-Go-The-Boats-	
S2 — School Year 2		
Just a Skin Thing — Coral Rumble	A Million Brilliant Poems (part one)	A & C Black, 2010
Please, Noah! — Tortoise — Judith Nicholls	The Usborne Little Book of Children's Poems	Usborne Publishing, 2003
Yuck — Paul Rogers	LAMDA Verse and Prose Anthology vol 17	LAMDA, 2009
S3 — School Year 3		
Squirrel — Mary Ann Hoberman	https://maryannhoberman.com/poetry	
Summer Goes — Russell Hoban	The Oxford Book of Children's Poetry	Oxford University Press, 2007
The Midnight Train to Nowhere — Cynthia Rider	Watch Out, There's a Ghost About!	Oxford University Press, 2002
S4 — School Year 4		
Littlemouse — Richard Edwards	I am the Seed that Grew the Tree	Nosy Crow, 2018
Norman the Zebra — Jeremy Lloyd	LAMDA Anthology of Verse and Prose vol 15	LAMDA, 1999
Silk-moth Monitor — June Crebbin	The Jungle Sale	Puffin Books, 1988
S5 — School Year 5		
Spring — Karla Kuskin	The Random House Book of Poetry for Children	Random House, 1983
Suzie's New Dog — John Ciardi	Rhyme Time 2	Beaver Books 1984
Truth — Barrie Wade	The Oxford Book of Children's Poetry	Oxford University Press, 2007
S6 — School Year 6		
Bed! – Joni Akinrele	A Spider Bought a Bicycle	Kingfisher, 1992
Pole Star — Eleanor Farjeon	Then There Were Three	J B Lippincott & Co, 1952
The Thin Prison — Leslie Norris	The Oxford Treasury of Children's Poetry	Oxford University Press, 1985
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S7 — School Year 7		
A Poem to be Spoken Silently — Pie Corbett	A Million Brilliant Poems (part one)	A & C Black, 2010
Ghost in the Garden — Berlie Doherty	The Oxford Book of Children's Poetry	Oxford University Press, 2007
Practising — Dorothy Gray	Guildhall Twelfth Anthology	Guildhall, 1971
S8 — School Year 8		
As I Watch — Steven Camden	Everything All at Once	Macmillan Children's Books 2018
Night Watch — Libby Houston	The Usborne Little Book of Children's Poems	Usborne Publishing, 2003
The Tom-Cat — Don Marquis	Junior Voices: the fourth book	Penguin Books, 1970
S9 — School Years 9 and 10		-
First Art Lesson — James Kirkup	The Works 2	Macmillan Children's Books,
Solitude — Ella Wheeler Wilcox	https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45937/soli- tude-56d225aad9924	2002
Trees in the Storm — Brian Patten	Juggling with Gerbils	Puffin Books, 2000
S10 — School Years 11 - 13		
Naming of Parts — Henry Reed	https://www.poemhunter.com/henry-reed/ebooks/?ebook=0&-	
	filename=henry_reed_2012_4.pdf	
The New Colossus — Emma Lazarus	https://www.nps.gov/stli/learn/historyculture/colossus.htm	D
Warning — Jenny Joseph	Jenny Joseph: Selected Poems	Bloodaxe Books, 1995