**Apples and Snakes**

**Spoken Word Archive**

**Six Teachers’ Toolkits**

**By Steve Tasane**

**Toolkit 1: Personification (for Key Stage 2 pupils)**

Personification is the practice of human qualities to objects, animals or abstract ideas, as demonstrated here by Valerie Bloom’s poem imagining rain as a person:

**Rain**

She makes the trees sway with delight.

She tells the long grass, ‘shiver’.

She puts the laughter in the stream,

And the gurgle in the river.

She drives the thunder grumbling off,

Orders the wind to sing,

Snuffs the lightning’s fire out,

Takes the roof tap-dancing.

She pours a drink for the thirsty earth,

Washes the face of the sky,

Puts a sparkle on the leaves

And a glint in the ocean’s eye.

She plays a tattoo on the windowpanes,

Paints doors a darker brown,

And creates a brand-new swimming pool

In the centre of the town.

In anger, she will pound the ground

With the force of a cannonball,

But happy, she sings a lullaby,

This celestial waterfall.

**Valerie Bloom**

from *Whoop an’ Shout* (Macmillan Children’s Books, 2003)

Listen to Valerie performing this poem at Apples and Snakes.

Present the class with printed copies of the poem, and ask a pupil (or pupils) to read it out loud. Then open up a discussion with the class about the nature of rain in the poem.

The class can be led towards identifying the human elements of the rain, first and foremost by the fact that the rain is described as ‘She’. Ask the class what are the points in the poem where the rain does things that only a person could do, such as:

She **tells** the long grass, ‘shiver’ (line 2)

She **drives** the thunder grumbling off,

**Orders** the wind to sing (second verse, lines 1 and 2)

**Takes** the roof tap-dancing (second verse, line 4)

She **pours a drink** for the thirsty earth (third verse, line 1)

She **plays** a tattoo on the windowpanes,

**Paints** doors a darker brown,

And **creates** a brand-new swimming pool (fourth verse, lines 1, 2 and 3)

In anger, she will **pound** the ground (fifth verse, line 1)

But happy, she **sings** a lullaby (fifth verse, line 3)

See if the class can identify other things within the poem, besides the rain, that have been personified into doing human things:

The trees that sway with delight

The grass that shivers

The stream that laughs

The thunder that grumbles

The wind that sings

The roof that dances

The earth that is thirsty

The ocean’s eye that glints

Ask the class what kind of personality they think the rain displays. Is she mainly kind? Creative? Celebratory? A nuisance? Which parts of the poem give us a sense of the rain’s personality, to make us believe that she may be kind?

The poem gives us an idea of her personality, but also in the final verse, describes her behaviour when she is feeling both *angry* and *happy*– because even bad people have kind days, and even generous people can sometimes feel mean. This contrast of moods emphasizes the human quality that Val has created for the rain, but generally we are left with an overall sense of positivity, in strength and in play.

You may have noticed that Val’s poem rhymes (every second and fourth line), but the personification within the poem is what impacts on the reader most powerfully. When working with the class to produce their own personification poems, it is helpful to focus on the imagery rather than on attempting to rhyme.

Note that even though there is lots of personification in this poem, there are no actual *people*; the rain is interacting with other *things*. For the class poem, if you do the same, it will help the pupils to focus more specifically on personification.

The best way to begin is by working as a class, using the whiteboard or OHP. I would suggest using a related subject, such as the sun. We are going to ask the class what the sun might get up to if she (or he) were a person. Here are a few questions to get things started:

What might the sun give delight to? (Not children!)

What might she tell something?

What would she want us to be rid of? (Gloom? Sadness?)

Apart from the sun ‘warming’ and ‘drying’, what human moods might she stimulate? (Excitement, play, relaxation, sleepiness, hot blooded anger, brightening up, etc)

What effect does she have on the town? On the beaches? On animals? And how?

Once you have your notes on the board, use a second board to turn these into simple lines of fact, beginning the first line with the word *She* or *He*. (The class may at this point have some discussion about whether the sun is a girl or a boy. What are the qualities of rain that led Val to describe rain as She? Is it the softness of her fall? Her giving of life? Her making of music? Her driving off thunder? Why do we assume that these are more feminine qualities? This discussion, of course, can be as short or as long as the teacher wishes. Obviously it can open up discussion about gender stereotyping, and how to avoid gender cliché – Val, for instance, has the rain pounding the ground in anger like a cannonball. Her rain is female, but she is no Barbie Doll.)

Thus the group poem would begin something like this:

**Sun**

She encourages the flowers to proudly display their petals

She gives the lazy cat a hot car roof on which to sleep

etc

Once the class has grown confident in this process, they may work either individually, or in groups, on their own poems. It is helpful to first come up with a list of suggested subjects for the poem. Here are a few to get you started:

A storm; greed; music; sleep; money; a mobile phone; a pet dog or cat; war.

**Toolkit 2: The John Hegley Word Potato (for Key Stage 2 pupils)**

Tea

**Potatoes**

Jam **Doggies** Romans

Dad Luton String Grandad

Dinner **Glasses** Sticks

**Sheds** Pudding Trains

Pop Buses Bikes

Chips Carrots

Above, we have – instead of a word cloud – a Word Potato. This Potato reflects some of John Hegley’s favourite topics for poems, and as such gives us a starting point for our own John Hegley-style poem. Each pupil can pick their subject matter from the Word Potato.

As well as the poems included here in the toolkit, John’s poetry can be shared [on video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzutne9XRBA)

 And you can hear him [live at Apples and Snakes](https://www.mixcloud.com/spokenwordarchive/john-hegley-apples-and-snakes-24-sep-1988/)  (John’s set starts at 3:45 mins)

Studying a poet and then trying to copy their style is a great way of learning, so below are a few examples of John’s poems, accompanied by some helpful observations, and a couple of short exercises.

**My doggie don’t wear glasses**

my doggie don’t wear glasses

so they’re lying when they say

a dog looks like its owner

aren’t they

John rhymes in places that are unpredictable and anti-instinctive.

In the above poem the opening 3 lines each have three beats (note that the *beat* in a line is best counted as if you are nodding your head or tapping your foot as you say the line – i.e: where the syllables have the weightiest emphasis – ‘my DOGgie DON’T wear GLASSes’). They also feature no rhyme at all, and contain all the meaning of the poem as a whole. The ‘aren’t they’ of the final line is only one beat long, and adds nothing to the meaning of the poem. It’s funny because it almost seems as if John has added the rhyming last line just to make the poem complete. It is right because it is so wrong. Here, I am copying John’s style to make the same point:

John rhymes in odd places

As he races along with glee

It does it for me.

Can you spot the internal rhyme in the verse above?

An internal rhyme is a rhyme that comes not at the end of a line, but within the body of a line. So the internal rhyme above is ‘races’ (in the middle of the second line, rhyming with ‘places’ at the end of line one).

As a class, see how many easy three-line verses you can make on the board, from the Word Potato above. Here are two to get you started:

Carrots are totally orange, but oranges are not carrot

But you might find little bits of orange

On a parrot.

Or

Buses, people moan, are too noisy and too smelly

But at least the journeys they take us on are real

Unlike those we take with the telly

Here’s another example of John using rhyme that doesn’t come as predictably as in rhyming couplets or regular form:

**A Comparison Of Logs And Dogs**

both are very popular at Christmas

but it is not generally considered cruel

to abandon a log

and dogs are rarely used as fuel

The unusual structure here is that the third line – to abandon a log – is shorter than we expect. It throws the poem off balance, and it is this imbalance, this clumsiness, that gives the poems their sense of slapstick humour – because they trip us up.

In The Arms of My Glasses and A Comparison Of Logs And Dogs both from Can I Come Down Now Dad? (Methuen 1991).

Sometimes John makes words up, as in this example:

**In The Arms Of My Glasses**

they can call me softy

as ofty

as they please

but still I’ll stand by these

my little optical accessories

they stop me walking into lampposts

and trees

when it’s foggy

and I’m out walking with my doggie

The word ‘ofty’ in the second line is changed from ‘often’, so it rhymes with the first line. This was a comic rhyming technique often used by the poet Ogden Nash. For example, Nash rhymed:

childer [children] with bewilder

gamie [game] with Jamie

enthusic [enthusiastic] with music

polysyllabulous [polysyllabic] with fabulous

jelliedy [covered in jelly] with melody

environs [environment] with sirens

disreputeful [disreputable] with fruitful

droopulous [droopy] with scrupulous

tennises [plural of tennis] with menaces

correckly [correctly] with heckly [likely to heckle]

hideo [hideous] with video

The reason these made-up words work is because the beginning of each word remains the same as the real word, it is only the ending that is changed in order to make the rhyme. So a list of similar words might be:

**Hungerful; importish; freezy; bullisome; smellible; sneerful; nicycal**

So *hungerful* might be used as a made-up word in the following rhyme.

1. Dinner wasn’t exactly wonderful

2. But that’s OK. None of us were very hungerful

For this exercise, give the pupils the list of Line 1’s below, and ask them to find the made-up word that rhymes from the **bold** list above, to create a full line 2 (like the example above). Pupils should be able to work individually and then the class can share the results and be inspired by each other’s choices.

1. The team leader was feeble and shortish
2. The wind was ferociously breezy
3. But what we all found so worrisome
4. His hair was horrible, his teeth were terrible
5. He wasn’t exactly cheerful
6. Barry loves to ride his bicycle

Sometimes John likes to avoid rhyme altogether, in order to deliver the unexpected punchline, as in this poem:

**Red Poem**

Danger!

Don’t tip that strawberry jam

into the post box.

Stop! Stop! If the post office van

turns up now,

you’ll be so embarrassed,

Dad.

(from Can I Come Down Now Dad)

In the same way that rhyme repeats the sound of a word, John here uses the repetition of urgent instructions: Danger! Followed by Stop! Stop! We would expect, when somebody is being addressed in such a way, that it might be a child misbehaving or being silly, and it is this that sets up the punchline that it’s not someone silly at all, but Dad.

Here is another example of the unexpected punchline that unexpectedly doesn’t rhyme, in a poem that sets its rhymes up as if it is going to be a limerick:

**The martian**

there was a young creature from space

who entered a three-legged race

he was not very fast

in fact he came last

because he was a bag of oven-ready chips

Published in The POW! Anthology 21-22 (New Departures, 1996)

Here is a selection of limericks by Edward Lear with the last lines missing. For this exercise, each individual pupil must provide their own – non-rhyming – final line:

There was an Old Man in a tree,

Who was horribly bored by a Bee;

When they said, ‘Does it buzz?’

He replied, ‘Yes, it does!’

?...?...?...?...?...?...?...?...?...?...?

There was an Old Man with a flute,

A serpent ran into his boot;

But he played day and night,

Till the serpent took flight,

?...?...?...?...?...?...?...?...?...?...?

There was an Old Man with a beard,

Who said, ‘It is just as I feared! –

Two Owls and a Hen,

Four Larks and a Wren,

?...?...?...?...?...?...?...?...?...?...?

You have now briefly studied John Hegley! Get your pupils to return to the Word Potato, choose their subject from the Potato, and write their poem as inspired by John. No rules! No rights! No wrongs! Just give it a go, and see how far Mr Hegley’s inspiring poetry can take you…

**Toolkit 3: Rhyming & Rapping (for Key Stage 3/4 pupils)**

**A Flock of Sound**

There is a rhythm, a soul’s rhythm,

A come in from the cold rhythm,

A no need to go rhythm,

A take off your bruise shoes

And shake off tomorrow rhythm.

There is a rhythm, a wild rhythm,

An adult’s just a child rhythm,

A blissed-out whispering

Smile while listening rhythm.

There is a rhythm, a higher than sky rhythm.

The rhythm of spaces, a sweet-tasting,

Liquor-laced rhythm. An eyelid-flicking,

Slick thigh-licking rhythm.

A come home to the comfort zone rhythm.

A relax in your black, take nothing back rhythm.

There is a rhythm, a rhythm.

A sweet-sounding grounded rhythm,

A spaced-out sense of place rhythm,

A give in to your within rhythm,

A rainy season body-teasing,

Dripping sugar-caned cocooned,

Landing on the moon rhythm.

A making-room rhythm.

A lake and mist lip-kissing dew-glistening,

Earthed and wired surround-sound future-bound,

Magic-carpeted and homeward bound rhythm.

A pain-soothing hip-moving pressure-releasing

Depression-decreasing graffiti-wriggling baby-

Giggling Zebra crossing – Walk Don’t Walk – button-pressing

Up town, down town dressing spirit-shaking earth-quaking

Ripples in a lake of a rhythm.

Ripples in a lake of a rhythm.

Ripples in a lake.

A flock of sound.

**Lemn Sissay**

from *Morning Breaks in the Elevator* (Canongate Books, 1999)

Rhyming, like any other skill, gets easier with practice. Rhymes can be funny, unexpected and musical – or they can be boring, predictable and awkward. When used well, a rhyme should add to the narrative and mood of the poem, rather than drag it down. A surprising rhyme can be as effective as a surprising twist in a story.

**There are five types of rhyme:**

**1. The full rhyme:** which exactly copies the sound of the consonants and vowels at the end of a word (bird, gird, stirred, etc)

**2. The half-rhyme:** of which there are two types. A) Consonance: which only exactly copies the *consonant* sounds at the end of a word (bored, guard, stirred, etc), and B) Assonance: which only exactly copies the *vowel* sounds at the end of a word (burp, gurn, worm etc)

**3. Alliteration:** a sort of reverse rhyme, which copies the sound at the beginning of a word (weak, warn, wail etc). Alliteration is a valuable 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.*

**4. The polysyllabic rhyme:** in which it’s not just the final syllable of a word that rhymes (syllable/killable, mystery/history, emotion/demotion etc).

**5. The homophone:** a word with an identical sound (bear/bare; new/knew; they’re/their) or identical spelling but different meaning (duck/duck; slight/slight; blow/blow; beat/beat). Some commentators do not consider homophones to be technically rhymes, and they are used rarely in poetry.

Sometimes rhyme can be a matter of conjecture, as differing accents mean that many people pronounce many words differently, particularly vowel sounds. So, what is a full rhyme in Yorkshire (bury/hurry) can rhyme differently in London (bury/very). Both rhymes are correct full rhymes, depending on the regional accent of the poet.

Here are some rhyming games, to get pupils to begin thinking in rhyming terms:

**Circle rhyme**

* In teams or with the full class, sitting in a circle.
* Give the group a beginning word to rhyme with. The aim isto see how many rhymes the pupils can come up with, so choose words with many rhymes, e.g: *eye… hair… skin… ears… score… wall… tree… blow… skip… wood… sun… glue*.
* Going round the circle, each person adds a new rhyming word out loud.
* The winning team comes up with the highest number of rhymes. If playing with the whole class, try each time to beat its own record.
* Each new word added must be a full rhyme (such as *shoot* with *boot –* but not *boot* with *boat*.)
* Encourage pupils to use words of more than one syllable, with a final syllable rhyme, such as *reply/deny, unfair/debonair, etc.*

**Rhyming tennis**

This is a game for two players facing each other, who must bat a rhyme back and forth. Players must use a new word each time they bat, and it must be a full rhyme (as explained above). 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 these rules apply. 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. Winner may stay on to face a new challenger, at the teacher’s discretion. If a player uses a homophone (see/sea) they must announce this by saying, ‘The *other* sea’.

It is important that the teacher chooses the rhyming word. If a tricky word (*orange*) 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, like duck, as pupils may even inadvertently use a corresponding swear word. If unsure, have a list of starting rhyme words written out beforehand. See the list of examples above, in Circle Rhyme.

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. If the class lacks this discipline, an alternative way of playing is in a circle, so pupils only think of one rhyme each, until somebody is out.A variation on this game is for the class to be split into groups, and given a 2-minute time limit to write down as many rhyming words for ‘eye’ (etc) as they can. The winning group is the one that comes up with the most rhymes. Some people wrongly describe alliteration as words that 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 *Bert bought…* 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.*

**Find the rhyme**

* Have a pupil read out Lemn Sissay’s A Flock Of Sound, while the class follows the poem on the page. Discuss it with the class, identifying the number of rhymes and half-rhymes in the first stanza:

There is a rhythm, a soul’s rhythm,

A come in from the cold rhythm,

A no need to go rhythm,

A take off your bruise shoes

And shake off tomorrow rhythm.

There is a rhythm, a wild rhythm,

An adult’s just a child rhythm,

A blissed-out whispering

Smile while listening rhythm.

The rhymes are:

*Cold* *no* go

Shoes shake tomorrow

Child *whispering*

*Smile* while *listening*

That is 11 rhymes in the opening 9-line stanza, as well as ‘rhythm’ ending 7 of the lines. The words in italics are half-rhymes with words that have occurred previously.

Now ask the class individually to identify the rhymes and half-rhymes in the second stanza:

There is a rhythm, a higher than sky rhythm.

The rhythm of spaces, a sweet-tasting,

Liquor-laced rhythm. An eyelid-flicking,

Slick thigh-licking rhythm.

A come home to the comfort zone rhythm.

A relax in your black, take nothing back rhythm.

The rhymes are:

Sky, *tasting, laced, eyelid* (half-rhymes with sky), *flicking* (half-rhymes with liquor);

*Slick, thigh-licking;*

*Comfort* (half-rhymes with come), *zone;*

*Black, back*

That is a total of 11 rhymes or half-rhymes in a six line stanza, as well as 6 repetitions of the word ‘rhythm’.

It is worth noting that **repetition** is also a very handy poetic tool. Repeating certain words or phrases can have a dramatic effect either with regard to the sound of a poem, or to its emotional impact. Here, Lemn’s repeat of the word *rhythm* serves not only as an aural addition to the other rhymes, but also as an anchor that consistently brings the reader/listener back to the point of the poem, which is of course rhythm and rhyme combined. When you listen to Lemn performing this poem, you will hear how he uses the very sound of the word *rhythm* as the musical centrepoint for the whole piece.

**A rhyme in time**

* Taking the following line from a poem of my own about boys crying, make a rapid-fire list with the class of end-rhymes for *‘leak’.* (i.e: *weak, speak* etc, and also half-rhymes such as *neat, defeat, relief* etc)

*Don’t let your tears out, don’t let ‘em leak.*

* In small groups, see how many rhyming lines each group can come up with for that line. **Each additional rhyming line must** **tell the audience more about what’s going on.**

e.g:

*Don’t let your tears out, don’t let ‘em leak.*

*If the class sees me crying, my future’s bleak.*

* It’s important that the rhymes are integrated into the poem. To illustrate this point you could give an example of where the second linedoesn’t really make sense with the first, and seems completely random, even though it rhymes correctly.

e.g:

*Don’t let the tears out, don’t let ‘em leak.*

*When I cry a mouse goes squeak.*

The class is now equipped to write their own rhyming/rapping poem. I suggest choosing a topic that suits the class, and then agreeing a starting line on the board (with an easy rhyming word, so they can get to a flying start!)

**Toolkit 4: Found Poetry/Cut-Up Poetry (for Key Stage 3/4 pupils)**

**It’s**

It’s

mics in cafes,

round tables and candles

It’s

lone poets standing like priests

preaching to congregations

some fire bullets

each word piercing skin

imprinting itself painfully

in memories

to prick its victim

three weeks later

It’s

Bohemian poets

caressing, cajoling

with tender language

pulling audiences

into mental embraces

faces glowing with memory

and attention

It’s

taunting, questioning poets

keeping audiences slightly at edge

It’s

a darkened theatre

lights

a lone poet’s solo show

an hour of delight

tears, magic

audiences held entranced in their seats

It’s

poetry

**Malika Booker**

(from *Two Five* CD, celebrating 25 years of Apples and Snakes)

Found Poetry is exactly what it says on the tin. It can be as simple as a list of ingredients. One of my favourite Found Poems was the advert for Just Juice, which went like this: ‘No Gunk, No Junk, Just Juice’ – a combination of rhyme, repetition and alliteration. Of course, in this instance, the advertiser is doing the poet’s job. A list of ingredients on a shampoo bottle, however, is intended to be merely informative – a legal obligation – rather than enticing; a poet might lift this list out of its contractual context and give a fresh dimension to the words by merely adding an ironic title.

Other examples of Found Poetry might be: collecting the wording of Missing Cat posters; notating train announcers explaining why the trains are late; a list of flat pack assembly instructions, interspersed with the curses of the person following the instructions, Oscar acceptance speeches rewritten as dictated by predictive text, etc.

Cut Up Poetry is a technique popularised by the poet William Burroughs, and later by musicians David Bowie and Brian Eno, amongst others. Cut Up Poetry takes the words of Found Poetry and cuts out certain phrases – often randomly – and rearranges them to create a new narrative. A straightforward example of this involves taking a daily newspaper and cutting out headlines to rearrange.

For this exercise, we will be combining the Apples and Snakes marketing team’s descriptive words with the Cut Up technique to create poems celebrating performance poetry itself.

First, if possible, take the pupils to watch an Apples and Snakes live event; or invite an Apples and Snakes poet to perform in your school; or listen to one of the live recordings that form part of this website.

Then, ask a pupil to read out Malika Booker’s poem *It’s*, written to mark Apples and Snakes’ 25th anniversary in 2008.

*It’s* celebrates the many different types of poets to have graced the Apples and Snakes stage, and this task is to create a similarly celebratory poem using Cut Ups from the archival poetry flyers printed below.

All you have to do is select the phrases that appeal to you (I have highlighted some of the more creative descriptions to help you choose), write them out on large sheets of paper, and then cut them out and rearrange them to create your own *It’s* poem. You may wish to add your own linking words so that the poem makes fuller sense, making whole sentences – or not! The choice is yours.

I recommend pupils first practice the techniques described in Toolkit 3, on rhyme and alliteration, to help identify the rhythmic and rhyming patterns that create a powerful sound.

Here are the words from the flyers:

**Sistas Under The Skin 15 March 1996**

Akure Wall – twinkle twinkle flaming fireball shooting star bright

Sisters Nefatari & Jenifer – sweet melodies…fiery…rap…swing…sibling synchronocity

Malika B – Africentric regality proclaiming reality Malika means Queen

Isha McKenzie-Mavinga – lyrical sojourn through the soul of Mother Earth

**We Press Button 24 Jan 1997**

Universally acclaimed and r.a.w as ever – Patience Agbabi is uncooked uncut uncaged unchained uncensored.

Fresh and funny Olga Michael brings the wigs

And sexy sussed Salena Saliva provides the venom

Deborah Lavin talks a vicious and malicious streak with a theatrical dimension

And Hannah K puts the music hall back into poetry,

While Edinburgh-based motormouth Sandie Craigie just tells it how it is.

These women press buttons and take no prisoners

**Sista II Sista 26 September 1997**

Power performer and chameleon choreo-poet Valerie Mason John reigns supreme as Queenie: a five-century old throwback with a manic monologue od transracial fostering and adoption.

Sharpshooter Salena Saliva says she’s the female Quentin Tarantino; tonight she taps her lyrical reservoirs, revs it up full throttle and takes it to the edge over and over.

Catch the trans-metaphoric express, stop off at the mind-space station and re-charge on the unique cultural alchemy of Ka’Frique.

And touch down on a conscious trip with the artful utterings of Anan.

**Womanspeak 13 March 1998**

Asha Bandele. A renowned headliner at the NuYorican Poet’s Café, Bandele has been acclaimed as ‘a life saver, a healer and a truthteller. Asha’s poems are libations filled with enough love and prayers to save a race.’ (Willie Perdomo). Raw words and uncompromising analysis to knock you upside your head.

Vanessa Richards. One half of the dynamic duo Mannafest, Vanessa performs poems questing for reason and reconciliation, balm for battlewounds, loud professors of hope and purveyors of free beauty.

Anan Collymore. Speaking from an African-British perspective, with influences drawn largely from jazz vocalists and Hip Hop, Anan braves the Stuff We Don’t Talk About in her powerful and evocative style.

Rebecca Sabin. Combining lyrical with satirical, Rebecca’s rhythmic brutality and seductive vulgarity brings an accessible thrust to the myths, clichés and stereotypes that inform our common experience. A provocative verbal dance show…

**Brother to Brother 4 October 1996**

International potent poetic powerhouse Martin Glynn makes a very welcome return to Apples & Snakes with COVEIS. An anagram of “voices” COVEIS is an intensely emotional roller coaster of physical theatre, poetry and song in which a young Black man confronts and deciphers the conflicting, jumbled voices in his head. “Exciting” The Times

Chocolate Art supremo Roger Robinson explores the treacherous territory of men and relationships with women – with other men – with themselves – with society.

Nubian crown prince Adisa reasons with, praises and mourns his diasporic family with positivity and passionate understanding, as always. “Adisa is the future” Benjamin Zephaniah.

From the roots of Moss Side Scorcha rises with profound overstanding. This metamorphic poet charts the history of the Black man from the slave to the 90s rude-boy.

**Brother to Brother II 30 May 1997**

Brother to Brother I proved there was a huge demand for fresh perspectives on the Black male experience, and tonight’s bill continues to blow stereotypes skyward.

Chris Abani uses slides, sax, cello and harp in Still Dancing, a sequence of poems based around his experience as a political prisoner in Nigeria.

Delroy Williams shares excerpts from Sensei Mileu, a rites of passage journey through the identity of men and African descent in contemporary Britain.

Jude the Observer adds the haunting sax sound of Kevin Reynolds to his own raw lyrical perspectives on living.

Pete Kalu is a mongrel dog/barking at the bold new moon, and a Black Star Rising

And MC Roger Robinson reflects on relationships and on the adjustment of men within society.

**Brothatalk 5 November 2004**

Marque Gilmore: Legendary drummer Marque Gilmore has been at the forefront of live drum ‘n’ bass since the early ‘90s, providing live beats and breaks to seminal drum ‘n’ bass DJs Fabio, Kemistry & Storm, Wilchild and Ray Keith, top dance music innovator Roger Sanchez, and an array of leading musicians, including Talvin Singh, A Guy Called Gerald, Funkadelic and Roachford.

Shariff Simmons: Hailed as this generation’s answer to Gil Scott Heron, Shariff Simmons is on the frontline of a new wave of poets delivering hard-hitting stories and experiences wrapped in imagery that one can almost taste. An icon of the New York arts scene, Shariff shifts effortlessly from the rhythms of funk, hip-hop and be-bop to a quieter savouring of silences.

Nolan Weekes: Nolan Weekes first made his mark with the renowned poetry collective 3+1, featuring Carl Ramsey, Darwood Grace and Natalie Stewart, which radically shook up the spoken word circuit in the ‘90s with their hip-hop-influenced poetry. Since then, Nolan has performed all over Europe and made numerous appearances on television and radio.

**Toolkit 5: The Extended Metaphor (for post-school students)**

**sun trap**

I

let her walk

into the calmness

of your hills

show her the glow

you’ve brought to leaves

the blush

to ripening fruit

sit her

in your sun trap

be the passing wind

teasing

the long grass

to rub

and scratch

against her skin

touch her

softly

be the juice

of mellow mangoes

running

from her mouth

bathe her

with cascading waters

from your rock

sit her

in your sun trap

be the penetrating

heat

rub

under the waters

of her flow

stir the histories

of her untouched

pools

tune her

nerve ends

to the wind’s

hot breathing

then melt

into her earth

as you tongue

your funky rhythms

and lap

against her beach

like morning tide

watching waves crash

against her reefs

flagged out

spaced out

sitting

in your sun trap

where the mind

meanders

with the streams

II

and when you have possessed

her

left her living

ritual metaphors

and the river dries

what will you do

with the body

in the rut

where will you search

for the dust of a mind

who

will stare

at that empty space

in the prison

of your sun trap

when dusk falls

calling night

**Jean ‘Binta’ Breeze**

from *Third World Girl*, Bloodaxe Books, 2011

Performed on 15 March 2002 at the ‘Pimp’ event, which you can listen to (at 41:02 mins) <https://www.mixcloud.com/spokenwordarchive/pimp-pt-ii-15-mar-2002/>

Jean ‘Binta’ Breeze’s *Sun Trap*, above, is an example of the extended metaphor (and also personification – see Toolkit 1). The poem addresses an unnamed ‘you’ who can be loosely interpreted as Time & Tide, and its interaction with a ‘she’ who can be loosely interpreted as Mother Earth. I say ‘loosely’ because Jean leaves these definitions unclear, allowing a dreamlike quality to the poem. She constructs a general metaphor for sexual sensuality through nature.

The poem describes *your hills*; *the glow you’ve brought to leaves*; *your sun trap*; your being the *passing wind* that *teases the long grass*; your being *juice of mellow mangoes,* and so forth. So although the imagery relates to the sun generally, it details an effect on Mother Earth by a process that the sun is very much part of.

In short, a metaphor is the practice of describing one thing as something entirely different, to give extra dimension to its description. Here are five:

**1. All the world’s a stage.**

**2. His room is a disaster zone.**

**3. He is a lion in battle.**

**4. She has a heart of stone.**

**5. The promise between us is a delicate flower.**

Metaphors are distinct from **similes** in that similes use images as a point of comparison using the words *with* or *as* (She has a heart *like* a stone. He fights *as bravely as* a lion in battle).

An extended metaphor is where substance is added to the initial description. So here’s Shakespeare, extending his *all the world’s a stage* metaphor:

**All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances.**

Shakespeare made two basic additions to the initial metaphor: that people are players, and that they enter and leave. If we were to extend the metaphor *his room is a disaster zone* by adding two further statements, we might write:

**His room is a disaster zone. A tornado has torn through it. His mother has declared a state of emergency.**

Ask the students to add two further statements to the above metaphors number 3 to 5, and ask the class to share what they have written.

Another classic extended metaphor is Valentine by Carol Ann Duffy, here:

<http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/carol_ann_duffy/poems/8116>

In this poem, an onion acts as a metaphor for a Valentine gift. Ask your students to identify the elements of the onion that reflect a passionate love affair in this poem.

The key elements they should identify are:

It is a moon

It undresses, layer by layer

It will make you cry

It is a photograph of grief

It has a fierce kiss

It is a wedding ring

Its scent will stay on your fingers

It can be deadly

What makes *Valentine* such a powerful metaphorical poem is that an onion seems like such an unlikely metaphor for a Valentine’s gift, but the *extent* to which Carol Ann Duffy makes her argument makes the metaphor feel very full, and totally apt.

Here is a creative exercise to give your students no option as to which metaphor they might use to describe a given subject, using the listed words and instructions below:

**Pic ‘n’ Mix Metaphor Game:**

**The subject:**

Detective

Sleep

Kisses

Words

Ocean

Wound

A promise

Justice

Hair

Laughter

A teacher

Capitalism

**The Metaphor:**

A trophy

A fashion show

Roses

A plaster

A dinosaur

A worm

A knife

A drum

A seed

A roadmap

Chains

Wine

For this exercise, you need to write each of the subject words on a scrap of paper and place it in a bag. Then do the same for each of the metaphors, in a different bag. The students must pick one word from each bag, and whatever they select, they must create a three-point metaphor, along the lines of the ones described above. As this is pot luck, some will be more obviously easy (such as A *teacher* plants *seeds* inside a pupil’s head) and some – like the Carol Ann Duffy’s Valentine onion, less so (such as *Sleep* is a *drum)*

So, for instance, if we take the trickier combination, the student might write something like:

**Her sleep was a drum, counting out her nights and days, the pitter-patter of her heart counterbalancing the harsh cymbal clash of her troubled nightmares.**

Once again, the students should share their results with one another to expand the learning process.

For the final task, students must specifically choose their subject and metaphor – either from the two lists, or their own idea – to create a more detailed extended metaphor poem, of similar ilk to *Sun Trap* or *Valentine*.

**Toolkit 6: The Talking Heads Poetry Portrait (for advanced post-school students)**

**Note: this exercise is only suitable for students who have previously studied the different types of poetic form.**

For this creative exercise, the student will create a ‘portrait’ of a poet, using a specific poetic form as the style of portraiture.

To begin, here is a short example of a poetry portrait of Homer Simpson:

he’s the early morning alarm clock that needs a new battery

he’s endless rain, all pitter-pat, pitter-pattery

he’s a busted sofa bed that can’t take the weightiness

he’s a double 99 that can’t take the flakiness

he’s an ice cream van that’s turned into an ambulance

he’s a big baboon with a bad case of flatulence

**Steve Tasane**

(unpublished, 2018)

Each line imagines Homer as if he is a specific type of thing (i.e: using metaphor). The things are, in order:

* **Time**
* **Weather**
* **Furniture**
* **Food**
* **Transport**
* **An animal**

As a starter exercise, ask the students to think of a famous person – specifically somebody with a larger-than-life personality – and come up with 6 metaphors for them, from the list above (for instance, if we were writing about Donald Trump, and were looking for a *Time* metaphor for him, we might write: *He is sixty years in the past, when lynchings were the norm and women knew their place*). These do not have to rhyme; the key point is that together they will paint a *consistent* picture of the famous person.

Next, the students should watch – at their leisure – the filmed Talking Heads interviews on the archive website <https://www.spokenwordarchive.org.uk/content/new-contributions/talking-head-interviews> Watching all the films may take some time, as each is around 40 minutes long; a short cut would be to watch the interviews with poets who are known to the students; or the students may wish to select a single poet based on their knowledge of that poet, or on a quick look at each video (bearing in mind that their specific task is to write a Poetry Portrait of one of the interviewees.)

Each student should ensure that they watch the entire filmed interview of the poet they have selected as the subject for their Poetry Portrait. While doing so, they should take *basic notes* of the following observations:

* General description: how the poet dresses; their eyes, mouth, hands, voice, hair; do they have any distinguishing features, such as tattoos, piercings or dreadlocks? Can we think of any similes for specific physical traits, such as their hands conducting like batons, or swishing like swords? Do they slice the air metronomically? Do their fingers make shapes, or dance like James Brown?
* If the poet is filmed in their home, what does the background say about them? Are they surrounded by books, or exotic art? Do these backgrounds evoke a sense of warmth or chaos or a well-ordered mind or childlike sense of fun?
* How do they speak? With warmth, seriousness, rapid-fire? What is the timbre of their voice? Do they laugh? Do they boom? Speak softly, intimately?
* While doing this, the student should be considering the six metaphors from the list above (*time, weather* etc).
* Finally, the student should click on one of the links for the poet performing one of their poems, and consider how their interviewing energy reflects (or contrasts) with their performing energy.

These notes will serve as the equivalent of an artist’s studies, sketches that are in preparation for an actual portrait.

Finally, and crucially, the student must decide on their style of poetry portraiture. *This requires a pre-determined understanding of poetic styles.* The simplest style will be *free verse*, which – as the phrase suggests – is free of any limiting structure, can be loose in its rhythm, free of rhyme, and of any length.

However, the poet chosen as the subject of the poem may be suggestive of a particular structure/type, such as:

* **sonnet**
* **pantoum**
* **rap**
* **ballad**
* **rant**
* **villanelle**
* **a series of haiku**

The student may now write their *Benjamin Zephaniah Sonnet*, their *Last Poets Ballad*, their *Joolz Haiku Sequence*, *John Hegley Pantoum* etc. Afterwards the students could discuss their choices, e.g: why did they choose the sonnet form to write about Benjamin?