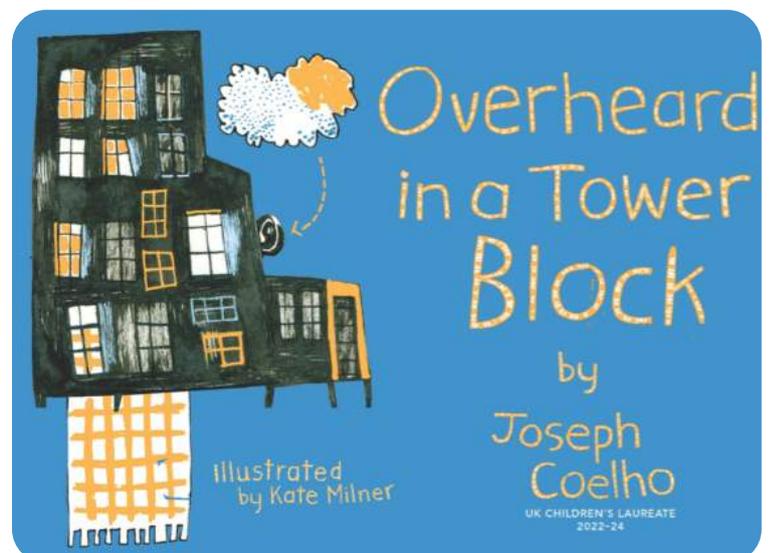


**EDUCATION
RESOURCE
PACK:
CREATIVE
POETRY**

Inspired by Joseph Coelho's
book and Little Angel
Theatre's adaption of
'Overheard in a Tower Block'



INTRODUCTION TO LITTLE ANGEL THEATRE

Little Angel Theatre, nestled in Islington, London, is a renowned puppet theatre dedicated to captivating young audiences through imaginative performances. Established in 1961 by John and Lyndie Wright, the theatre has evolved into a vibrant hub for puppetry, offering a diverse range of productions, workshops, and educational resources.

The theatre's commitment to education is evident in its comprehensive offerings for schools. Through the Schools Partnership Programme, Little Angel Theatre provides digital and live performances, along with a wealth of online resources, including puppet-making guides and curriculum-linked activities. These resources support cross-curricular learning in subjects such as English, Science, Art, and PSHE.

For educators seeking to integrate puppetry into their teaching, the theatre offers professional development opportunities. Workshops cover various aspects of puppetry, from shadow puppets to table-top puppets, equipping teachers with practical skills to enhance classroom engagement.

Little Angel Theatre's dedication to fostering creativity and imagination makes it an invaluable resource for educators aiming to enrich their students' learning experiences through the art of puppetry.

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE PACK

We're delighted to share this resource with you, developed to support and extend the experience of our stage adaptation of Joseph Coelho's powerful poetry collection; but also to use as a standalone resource.

At the heart of this production is a belief in the transformative power of both poetry and puppetry – two art forms that speak vividly to children's imaginations. Like poetry, puppetry is full of metaphor and rhythm. A puppet doesn't just tell a story – it embodies it. Whether it's a girl imagined as a bird or a librarian made of books, puppetry allows abstract ideas and emotions to take visible, tangible form.

In bringing *Overheard in a Tower Block* to the stage, we wanted to honour the richness of Joseph's poems while creating something visually and physically alive. Through the use of puppets, movement and sound we aimed to give young audiences a way to see, hear, and feel poetry – not just as words on a page, but as something active, creative, and personal.

This education pack builds on that approach, offering a range of activities that explore figurative language, rhythm, character, and creativity. Whether you're working with your class before or after seeing the show – or simply using the poems as a starting point – we hope that these resources support meaningful and playful engagement with poetry in your classroom.

Thank you for joining us on this journey through stories, sounds, and soaring imaginations.

OVERHEARD IN A TOWER BLOCK: POETRY AND PUPPETRY

Little Angel Theatre's production of *Overheard in a Tower Block* brings poetry to life, quite literally, through the art of puppetry. This resource pack is designed to help you explore that synergy in the classroom, using the visual and physical language of puppetry to deepen students' understanding and enjoyment of poetry.

At first glance, poetry and puppetry may seem like very different art forms. But both are rooted in imagination, metaphor, and rhythm. Both can conjure vivid images and emotions with surprising economy – a few well-chosen words, or a single stylised gesture. When brought together, they become a powerful educational tool.

This adaptation of Joseph Coelho's poetry collection uses puppetry not just as illustration, but as interpretation. Metaphors in the poems are given physical form: Sarah becomes a bird, all twitch and peck; the librarian is made of books; the artist is an easel. These striking visual choices help students access abstract ideas and figurative language in a concrete, engaging way.

Rhythm, too, is a shared language. Just as rhythm gives poetry its beat and emotional pulse, it is the breath that gives a puppet life. In watching or creating puppet theatre, students begin to feel the rhythm of a line or a scene, learning how pace, pause, and movement shape meaning.

This pack includes activities that encourage students to explore metaphor, character, and poetic form through writing, discussion, and performance. Whether or not you have access to the show itself, the resources here are designed to inspire creative responses, support curriculum learning, and foster confidence in working with poetry.

By combining poetry and puppetry, *Overheard in a Tower Block* invites students to listen, imagine, and create, and to see how language, like puppetry, can transform the everyday into something extraordinary.



LITTLE ANGEL THEATRE'S PRODUCTION—USE OF POETRY IN THE SHOW

Most of these poems feature in their full form in the show, however some have been slightly cut or altered to fit with the narrative or characters of the play, noted below:

F= Full length version, E = Edited version.

Poems from the anthology that feature in the show:

(Listed in the order they feature in the anthology)

- Binley House (F)
- Smashing Snails in the Rain (E)
- Light-Bringer—Prometheus 1 (E)
- Trainers (F)
- Argument (F)
- Learn the Basics of Electronics with the Electronic Project Lab for Kids! 50 different circuits that you can build at home (F)
- The Duelling Duo (E)
- The Watchers (F)
- Richmond Park (E)
- The Pen Ponds (E)
- Tables Red, Green and Blue (E)
- Disappearing Act (E)
- The Mermaid Queen (E)
- Eastbourne (E)
- There are Things that Lurk in the Library (E)



JOSEPH COELHO : ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND HIS WORK

Joseph Coelho (OBE FRSL) is a British poet and children's book author who was Children's Laureate from 2022 to 2024. The renowned poet and playwright, was born in London in 1980.

Coelho grew up in a tower block in Roehampton, England. His *Overheard in a Tower Block* poetry anthology is inspired by this time living in Binley House as a child.

He became interested in poetry when a poet visited his school whilst Coelho was in sixth form. Joseph went to University at UCL, where he studied Archaeology. While at university, he loved acting in plays and taking part in poetry events, which helped him become a great performer and writer.

After finishing school, he started writing poems and plays, creating books that people of all ages enjoy. One of his most famous poetry books is called *Werewolf Club Rules*, published in 2014. In this book, he writes about imagination, feeling like you belong, and being yourself. His poems are fun and meaningful, making readers think and feel connected.

Coelho has also written books for children, like *Luna Loves Library Day* and *If All the World Were*. These stories talk about important things like friendship, family, and the happiness of reading, helping children learn valuable lessons in a simple and engaging way.

His writing is loved by many people, and he has won awards for his poetry. In 2015, his book *Werewolf Club Rules* won the CLPE Poetry Award, showing just how talented he is.

Coelho's books and poems inspire children and adults alike to explore their imaginations and enjoy storytelling!



Joseph Coelho's writing is rich with themes that resonate with readers of all ages. Some key themes that appear throughout his works include:

Imagination & Creativity – His books and poems celebrate the power of storytelling and creativity, encouraging readers to dream big.

Identity & Belonging – Coelho explores the journey of self-discovery, helping readers understand themselves and where they fit in the world.

Family & Relationships – Many of his stories highlight the importance of family bonds, friendships, and human connections.

Grief & Healing – He delicately handles themes of loss and emotions, making them accessible to young readers.

Social Issues – His writing often touches on important topics like diversity, inequality, and personal struggles.

Magic & Wonder – Whether through fairy tale retellings or poetry, Coelho infuses a sense of enchantment into his storytelling.

POETRY LESSONS: INTRODUCTION

These lessons are designed to suggest creative ways to teach poetry in the classroom, focusing on four key poems from the anthology. As well as studying each poem in detail there are ideas for incorporating puppetry and performance into your teaching. These poems have been selected because they are integral to the main themes drawn out in Little Angel Theatre's play inspired by the anthology, and there are some references to the show and the puppetry design used in the show—as well as accompanying images in this pack to support your teaching even if you haven't seen the performance.

Poems covered in this resource pack:

- Binley House
- Argument
- The Duelling Duo
- The Watchers

For each poem, there is a selection of creative activities to support teachers in exploring the above poems through drama, art and/or puppetry.

For each poem there is also a guided reading session plan.

Please note that activities do not need to be followed in order, and activities can stand alone depending on how much time is available (unless otherwise specified).

Although the activities in this pack have been linked to specific poems many of them could be adapted and used when teaching a variety of poems from the anthology.



This picture shows Seb, the protagonist of the story, reading a book in the library – one that Mrs. Badger, the librarian, has recommended. Mrs. Badger understands that getting lost in a book is a wonderful way to overcome stresses and worries. Her character has been designed with elements of a book incorporated into her hair and face.

BINLEY HOUSE

TV aerials like dead branches,
satellite dishes like dead eyes,
rusted, but still they stared.
It was a zombie of a block.

The bin chute
made the mouth of the block.
Every day we fed it...

dinners left to go stone cold,
bags of clothes from missed fathers,
tissues soaked in tears.

The cold whistle of wind
from the corridors of Binley House
became the block's hiss for more.

The slam of distant doors
from the homes within Binley House
became the block's rumble of hunger.

We fed the block our lives:
the good times, the bad times,
evenings spent with friends who lived
above, below and side by side.

Gazing at stars from five stories up,
smelling the bins from five stories below.
Overheard arguments.
Overheard laughter.

We fed the block our lives
as it swelled
Its monstrous city around us.



BINLEY HOUSE: INTRODUCTION AND ACTIVITIES

The tower block referenced in the play/book is 'Binley House', a council estate where the author grew up. Binley House is a real place, located near Richmond Park in South West London.

Useful Links

Images and the location of Binley house on Google Maps.

Link to a video of the author reading Binley House



Activity 1—Read the poem

- After an initial listen to the poem ask pupils to reflect on what their first thoughts are about the poem. What did they like about it? What did they notice?
- In pairs, give them a few minutes to read the poem to each other and discuss what they noticed this second time around reading it themselves instead of listening to it. Share this back with the class.

Activity 2 – Similes

- Show pupils the video of Joseph explaining his use of similes in poetry writing, particularly when describing "Binley House". [Link to video of Joseph talking about similes in the poem Binley House](#)
- This video includes a poetic challenge around using similes to describe your surroundings and Joseph asks each child to describe their homes. Instead invite pupils to come up with a description of the classroom/school. Each pupil should write three similes describing something in the class/school, inspired by the language and format Joseph describes/uses in the poem.

Examples of these three similes could include:

The clock ticks like a bomb

Rows of desks like soldiers in a parade

Books stacked high like a tower

- After they have come up with their three similes about the classroom/school, put them into pairs/groups and ask them to share their similes with each other. They should find ways to best combine their sentences together to create one longer poem. Have them think about the placement and order of the similes, if they wanted to edit or change anything to make it rhyme or flow more easily.
- Once they have done this, groups can present their final combined poem that includes all their favourite similes back to the class. This could be a shared reading or with one nominated reader per group.

BINLEY HOUSE: ACTIVITITES

Activity 3 – Object Puppets

Note: While this activity could stand alone, the understanding of Joseph's use of similes in the text will be useful to reference.

- Taking inspiration from similes in the text, the design team at Little Angel Theatre made puppets for the show that reflect either the roles these characters play or the way they were described in the poetry (librarian with book hair, artist with body of easel) – Show pupils pictures of the puppet designs (a full set can be found on page 10 of this pack. These, along with photographs of the finished puppets, are also accessible to download via a Google Drive [HERE](#)).
- Think about how you might design a character in this way – How would the objects selected help identify who the character is? How would the chosen objects help describe the characters personality?
- Explain that designers make puppets by creating a design blueprint or drawing first (a drawing to help visualise their ideas). Ask students to think about a character they want to create and who they are. What objects do they need to make this character? This could be a simple idea like designing a cat puppet from a ball of wool or a chef puppet from a spoon/fork. Ideas could be more complex like making a pilot puppet out of a plane or an evil truck driver made out of wheels and chains. Their imaginations can run wild as this is just a design! You can use the template on page 11 to draw design ideas.
- If pupils need help coming up with ideas, give them some examples of objects: what sort of character would they make from a tennis ball, a sponge, a cactus? What could this object say not only about their role, but also about their personality?
- As an extension: Think about how the puppet moves and where the puppet would be held by a puppeteer and add this into the design. If the puppet design is simple enough, consider gathering the materials needed to actually bring these puppets to life and allow students to make/operate their puppets.



This is the puppet design and the finished puppet representing the substitute teacher. The characters face is made using items you might find in a classroom like pencils, graph paper, and if you look really closely you can even see school desk graffiti written all over their face!

PUPPET DESIGNS FROM LITTLE ANGEL THEATRE'S PRODUCTION

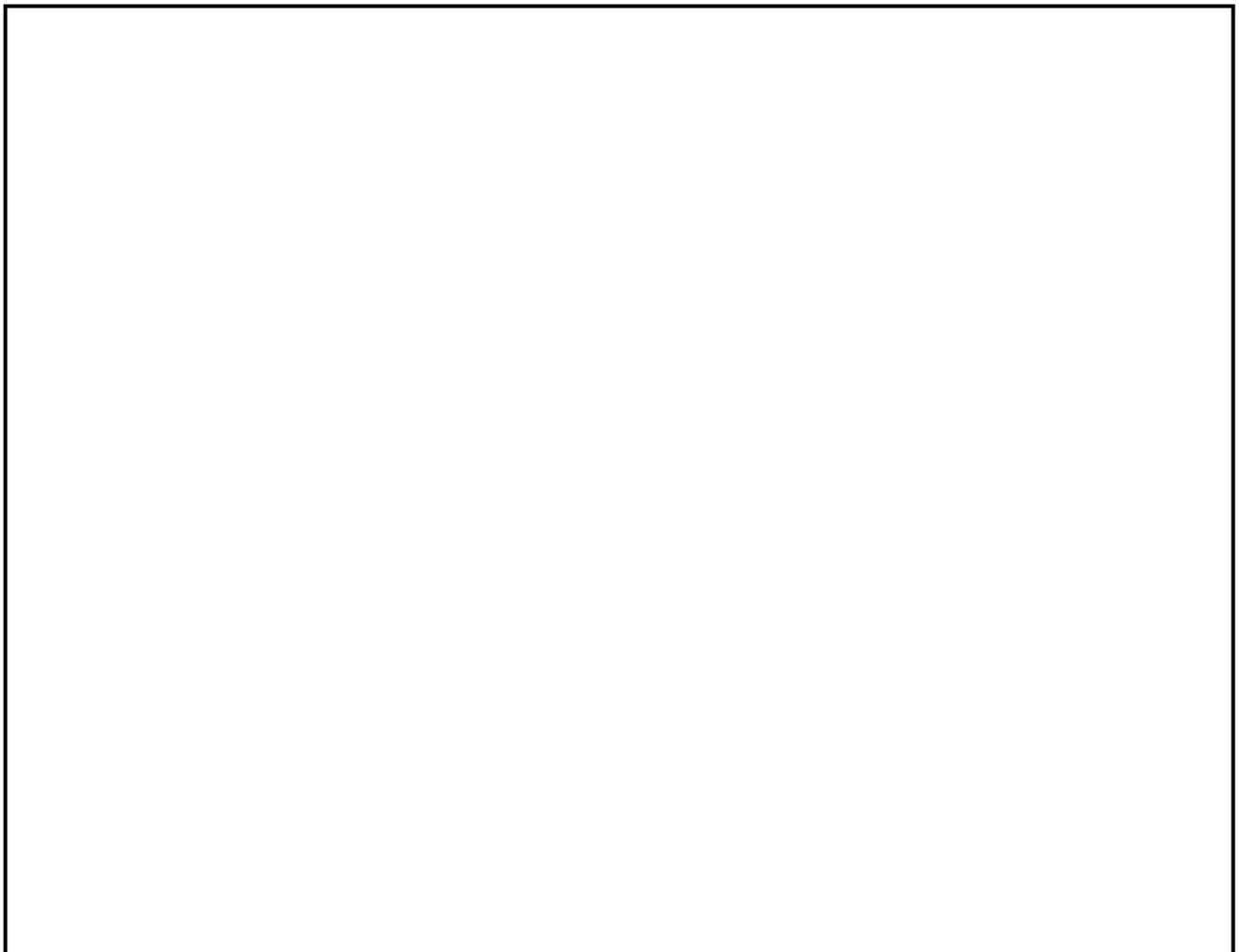
The design of these puppets has been inspired by the characters' interests, job or personality traits, often using objects or symbols associated with these as part of the design. Examples of this include, an easel for the artist's body, book pages for the librarian's hair and pencils for the substitute teacher's hair. The Headteacher is a large towering figure with a mask like face, representing an impersonal and intimidating character. The bully, Sarah, is made in the form of a bird, as the poem about her describes her in bird like terms.



OBJECT PUPPET TEMPLATE

Name of your character	
Who is your character? (artist, teacher etc.)	
What objects describe who your character is/what they do?	
How would you describe your character's personality?	

DESIGN YOUR CHARACTER BELOW!



BINLEY HOUSE: ACTIVITIES

Activity 4– The Tower Block Soundtrack

The sounds of the Tower Block are integral to the poetry and the overall design of the show. The creaking, groaning and mechanical noises of the building – along with the everyday activities and voices of the people and animals who reside there – help bring the words to life.

- Ask pupils what noises they think they'd hear in a tower block. Get a few suggestions and then divide the class into groups.
- Give each group responsibility for a particular sound (e.g., birds chirping, shouting, laughing, wind, etc.). Have one group start off quietly, then gradually add in each group's sound one at a time until all the groups are overlapping, creating the soundtrack of the tower block. Play with volume by making some groups quiet while others grow louder, and vice versa.
- Incorporate the soundscape into a performance reading of the poem. Think about when the sounds should come in and how they interact with the poem's stanzas. Can some sounds happen quietly in the background while the poem is being read?
- Extension—After creating the soundscape, ask for a few volunteers to act as characters in the tower block. Ask them who they are (e.g. a mum with a crying baby, a gardener tending to a tree, someone walking their barking dog etc.) What might they say? What would they do with their body? What are their facial expressions?
- These volunteers should decide on one line for their character, which can then be added into the soundscape.



The tower blocks on the set are characters themselves. Their design is robot-like, giving them a life of their own, which is enhanced through sound and lighting. These same structures also represent the statues—the Witches—that the children fear so much.

GUIDED READING: BINLEY HOUSE

Learning Objectives: Reciting poetry using expression, rhythm and tone. Identifying simile and metaphor.

Initial Reading: Read the poem aloud to the group, emphasising its rhythm and tone. Ask pupils to listen carefully and note any words or phrases that stand out to them.

Discussion: Ask students what images or scenes from the poem are most vivid? What emotions does the poem evoke? Why?

Creative Response: Ask students to create a character profile of someone who might be living in the tower block. Write a short paragraph from the perspective of someone living in the tower block. What might they be doing/thinking/saying/feeling?

Share: Have pupils share back their paragraphs and characters they created. Based on the character and their perspective, which line in the 'Binley House' poem would they be most likely to say/connect with?

Final Reading: Split the poem up and go around the group with each pupil reading the line(s) they selected as most relevant to their character. Again, emphasise tone in regards to how the characters they created would express those lines to enhance the meaning. Ask pupils how bringing the tower block to life with different characters changed their understanding of the poem.

ARGUMENT

The monster
with a roar made up of
shouts.

Its jaws snap
like slamming doors.
Its stomach rumbles
like cars driving away.

Its scales scrape
like boxes being packed.
Its claws clatter
like kitchen drawers.



ARGUMENT: INTRODUCTION

In the show the imagery of the poem is illustrated using shadow puppetry. The idea of an argument being like a monster that feeds on angry words is represented in a highly visual and literal way using this technique.

Within this poem, the main character experiences many moments of tension, including an argument his parents have that he is witness to.

The poem Argument describes the argument as a monster. Pupils will be given the chance to bring this monster to life based on the poet's descriptive language.

Activity 1 — Read the poem

- In the Binley House poem, the tower block is described 'like' a monster and in this poem, the argument becomes a monster. Have a discussion around the language used in the poem that helps creates the image of this 'monster'. How is it similar or different to the language used in Binley House?
- Re-read the Binley House poem again if needed.



The shadow puppets used to illustrate the Argument poem are projected onto the screen simply using a torch light. The monster gobbles the angry words.

ARGUMENT

Activity 2—Exquisite Corpse

- Each pupil should get a blank piece of A4 paper and fold it into thirds.
- As a class, re-read the poem and focus on how it describes the monster, starting with its head. Give students a few moments to draw what they think this monster's head looks like in the top section of the folded piece of paper, based on the description in the poem. The drawing can be a literal interpretation based on the poet's language or can be more abstract. Once finished, they should fold back the top third of the paper that has the drawing of the head, and pass the paper to another pupil. Make sure to tell them not to peek yet!
- Now read aloud the next part of the poem that describes the body/arms of the monster and repeat the activity for the middle section. Fold back when finished and pass along. Follow the same instructions for drawing the legs/feet of the monster after reading the poem to the end.
- All pupils should now have a piece of paper with a full monster drawing on it, each section depicted by a different student and inspired by the poem's language. They can unfold all the sections to reveal this 'exquisite corpse'! Pictures could be hung up on the wall and pupils walk around the room to experience a 'gallery viewing', sharing back which drawings they like and why, why they drew certain parts of the monster's body in a specific way, and how the monster is similar or different than they imagined etc.
- As an extension, you could use various craft materials to turn these monsters into puppets or use the illustrations to inspire poetry writing.



This example illustrates some of the similes the pupils might pick up on— Jaws like slamming doors, a stomach like cars driving away, and claws clattering like kitchen drawers.

ARGUMENT

Activity 3– Group Monster

- Find an open space—either a hall, an outdoor area, or a classroom with tables and chairs pushed to the side. Divide pupils into groups of 4–5.
- Each group will create the argument monster based on the poet’s descriptions. As they read the poem line by line, different members will embody various parts of the monster—one person becomes the head, another the mouth, and others the arms, scales, and so on.
- Groups should discuss how each body part moves and interacts, ensuring the monster has a unified, collective movement. They should explore how the monster reacts, grows, and shifts in response to the emotions in the poem.
- Finally, each group will present their living, breathing argument monster to the class, showcasing their interpretation of the poem’s imagery through movement.



THE DUELLING DUO

In the pitch of night
Two knights shared a thought,
With a sword in each hand
as they slashed and fought
On the highest ramparts
Of the crumbling fort.

The duo duelled
with their duel swords
hacking left then right,
their metal ringing,
each convinced they were right.

One would hit—one would miss
In the mine-dark night
with its coal-fist mist.
One blade rang on a helmet,
Hand tight on a hilt-rung sword,
both proving their mettle
In this mourning morning.

Each trying to raze
the other to the ground,
ignoring the sun's rays,
they danced their iron,
refusing to pause,
ignoring the sweat
that rained from their pores,
each desperate to reign
with their armour-bash peel.

The same thought in each head
that neither could still.
Both were right,
could not be wrong.
Apparent in their blades, raised.
Transparent in their eyes, glazed.

"I am right".

The lie they thought
as they fought
in the fort.

THE DUELLING DUO: INTRODUCTION

The Duelling Duo has a fairy tale setting, describing what seems to be two knights battling with swords clashing in a fort. But the poem – and many of the words within it, represent more than one thing. Joseph uses the knights to represent his arguing parents, the fort to represent his home, and the swords to represent the sharp words they use against each other. By stepping back from the reality of arguing parents and putting them into the fairy tale world of knights and castles it helps the young protagonist face what is going on around him in a slightly more detached way. In the Little Angel production this poem is depicted as a nightmare and presented using shadow puppetry.

Useful Links

Joseph Coelho reads his poem The Duelling Duo

Activity 1—Read the poem

- Read/listen to the whole poem. Think about the context of the poem within the anthology. Who is really 'duelling?' where/what is the 'fort'?
- Discuss the fairy tale setting and how this may help the poet to distance themselves from the reality of his parents fighting. The double meaning of the poem is also reflected in the double meaning of some of the words used.
- Can pupils identify any words that sound the same but have different meanings within the poem? What are these called? (Homophones).
- Can pupils identify any rhymes?

Activity 2— Frozen Fighters

- In pairs pupils create frozen poses of a pair of duelling knights, taking inspiration from the descriptions of actions in the poem, also thinking about facial expressions and emotions.
- Pairs could be asked to focus on a particular stanza or line as the inspiration for the image they create. Multiple pairs could use the same part of the poem as inspiration and then these are shared back to the rest of the class as a group.
- Encourage pupils to reflect on their physical expressions and movements. Ask them to explain why they chose particular poses or facial expressions. Were there specific words or phrases in the poem that influenced their choices?

For example:

- What emotions did you want to show with your pose or expression?
- Which words or lines in the poem made you decide on that movement?
- How does your pose reflect the mood or message of the poem?

ARGUMENT & DUELLING DUO

Activity 3 – Reconciliation Poem

- Invite students to write a response poem that explores what happens after an argument as a way to reconcile (make up). The objective is to explore healing, apology and understanding through poetry writing.
- The poem could be from the perspective of someone who has observed an argument (as in the original poems) or could be from the point of view of one of the people involved in the argument.
- Once pupils decide whose voice they want their poem’s perspective to be from, have a group discussion or individual reflection/free writing in response to the following questions/prompts:
 1. Why did the fight start?
 2. What is left unsaid?
 3. What might happen after the argument?
 4. Is there regret, apology, hope, or pride?
- Discuss ideas around how different emotions might feel in the body—heavy, light, hard, soft?
- What kind of imagery relates to healing? (e.g. repairing something, weather clearing, silence breaking, healing wounds). Create some simple sentences using similes and metaphors and healing.
- Once they have their notes and an understanding of their character’s perspective, guide them through crafting a short poem, starting with “Reconciliation” as the title. Model a version using a similar structure to Argument (example below), using ‘like’ and thinking about using similes.
- Once written, students can read their poems aloud.

Reconciliation (example poem)

The fight,
with a heat like fire.
Roaring and burning hot
like dragons breath.
The cooling effect of kind words
like a soothing balm.
The gentle mist of sorry tears
like steam,
rising from the warming mug of hot chocolate
that we share,
Together.



GUIDED READING: ARGUMENT

Learning objectives: Reciting poetry using expression, rhythm and tone. Identifying simile and personification.

Poetry Prompts #15: Bring your pencil case to life! – Personification

Discuss: Ask pupils what they think a poem titled "Argument" might be about. Get some responses and then ask them what emotions are felt during an argument.

Reading: Read the poem aloud to the group and afterwards ask them which of those emotions they previously mentioned were felt in the poem, and if there were any new ones.

How has the argument been represented in this poem?
(personified as a monster)

There is repetitive use of the word 'like' – Why? Use of similes to help with description.

Creative Response: The main character is clearly observing an argument. Ask students to break down each line of the poem, and based on the descriptive language, what do they think the characters might actually be saying to each other? Have pupils write down a few phrases of what they think the character would be saying for each line of the poem.

Act it out: Now that they have an interpretation of what the characters would be saying in this argument, ask them to think about what would their tone of voice be, how loud, what would they be doing with their body etc. How would you act out a fight like this? Give pupils the opportunity to act out some of this dialogue with each other.

Final Reading: Split the poem up and go around the group with each pupil reading a line, keeping in mind the tone and emotion behind each line as they discovered from the previous exercise. Ask pupils how creating a dialogue of what the characters were saying in the poem changed their understanding of it.

GUIDED READING: THE DUELLING DUO

Learning Objectives: Alternate rhyming patterns. Homophones.

Poetry Prompts #48: Homophones

Discussion: Read the title. What do the words mean? What is the poem going to be about? Note the alliteration used.

Reading: Read the first stanza out loud to the group. Answer the questions: Where? When? What? Why?

Are there any rhyming patterns? (note that the 2nd and 4th and 6th line rhyme – thought, fought and fort) Do they notice anything else about any of these words? – Fought and Fort sound the same but they have different spellings and meanings. This is a homophone (words that sound the same but have different spellings/meanings)

Read the whole poem out loud as a group, sharing out the stanzas. Check understanding.

Individual Reading – Rhymes: Reading silently/individually ask pupils to read back through the whole poem – Noting down the rhyming pattern/words in each stanza – Share back as a group. Is the pattern of where the rhymes appear the same in each stanza? Explain that rhyming patterns don't need to be the same throughout a poem.

Individual Reading – Homophones and Homographs: Reading silently/individually read back through the whole poem – Note down any other homophones (e.g. rays/raze, pause/pores) can they look up the meaning of any words they don't know? Share back with the group. Can they come up with any other examples of words that are homophones? (mettle/metal)

Does anyone know what a Homograph is? (same word/spelling but different meaning). The poet uses a Homograph in stanza 2? What is it? (use of the word 'right' – To mean the direction and being correct. This word sounds the same and is spelt the same, the context within the sentence is the way we derive meaning).

Final Reading: Read the whole poem again. Think about the context of the poem within the anthology. Who is really 'duelling?' where/what is the 'fort' – The fairytale setting may help the poet to distance themselves from the reality of his parents fighting. The double meaning of the poem is also reflected in the double meaning of some of the words used.

THE WATCHERS

The children felt the eyes
burning down into their backs.
They turned and saw three statues
down by the crossed tracks.

Their legs were thin and sharp,
their heads were bronze blocks.
The children grasped their courage,
took aim with dirt and rocks.

Stones clanged off the metal,
mud sucked the faceless grins.
The children kept-up their assault,
then heard a malefic din.

A droning from the statues,
a blade scrapes teeth in a jaw,
a sound so full of hatred that
the children dropped down to the floor.

They quivered as the snow fell
on this bone-October night.
The statues gawped, sightless,
as the moon began to bright.

The children's knees were knocking,
tears juggling from their eyes.
The statues kept up their stare,
eager for their prize.

One child ventured nearer,
though fear told her to flee.
The statues' gazes deepened,
each peered more hungrily.

She ventured a hand to feel
the bronze, black shining skin.
The statues tensed to the touch,
the girl felt her finger sting.

A smudge of red barely visible
amongst the metal and the mud.
The children fled, screaming.
the girl, sucked at the blood.

The statues on the crossed-tracks
had hoped the children would linger.
They rippled as they savoured
the taste of that girl's finger.

The statues are always watching
from the tracks upon the hill.
They sing for flesh and blood.
They're out there singing still.

THE WATCHERS: INTRODUCTION

The poem *The Watchers* is inspired by large scale bronze sculptures that were situated in Roehampton near Binley House where Joseph grew up. The artwork, by Lynn Chadwick, made a lasting impression on Joseph with their distinctive block heads and spindly legs.

"These statues scared me and all my friends so much so that we referred to them as The Three Witches and stayed clear. I would pass them every day on my way to school. I lived on top of a hill and at the bottom of the hill was my school so as I walked to school I would feel the statues staring down onto my back." – Joseph Coelho

This poem was also inspired by Walter De La Mare's *The Listeners* and the silent fear of an unknown presence.

In the Little Angel Theatre production the statues are referred to as the Witches and were designed as three large dominating structures on stage which also represent Tower Blocks. The statues also appear in shadow puppet form, and at the end of the play one of the 'Witches' is also represented in puppet form as a the Muse of Poetry and Storytelling. Seb encounters this creature in a dream like state when he falls into the waters of Pen Ponds.

Useful Links

Joseph reading *The Watchers*
<https://youtu.be/r-DbWmuJACM?si=s4gL4C4xsZBaPjEV>

Little Angel Theatre YouTube instructions for making shadow puppets
<https://youtu.be/2RyI5-B-SKw?si=CFqVYC65NjKhRZgW>

Little Angel Theatre YouTube Shadow puppet example film (Moonlit Mudlark)
https://youtu.be/huQpPTs9S4U?si=hewq_XDUMV84oAXM

Michael Rosen reads *The Listeners* by Walter De La Mare
https://youtu.be/Mw4FbniQzFk?si=5lyW6alT4_uExQHM
Information about Lynn Chadwick's sculptures *The Watchers*
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Watchers_\(sculpture\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Watchers_(sculpture))
Information about Lynn Chadwick and his work
<https://lynnchadwick.org/>



THE WATCHERS

These activities need to take place in a larger open space or in a classroom with tables and chairs pushed back.

Activity 1- Freeze Frame Creepy Statues

- Read the title and the first two stanzas.
- Who/what are the Watchers? Who is being watched? How do the children in the poem being watched feel? How can you tell?
- Look at pictures of Lyn Chadwick's *The Watchers* and the representations of the watchers/witches from Little Angel Theatre's production. Discuss how the children might feel about these characters watching over them.
- In groups of 3 – Make a frozen image (freeze frame photograph) of 3 creepy staring statues – Hold them frozen as if they were statues for a slow count of 5.
- Ask half of the class get into their statue poses and the other half to creep around taking a look at the statues.
- Ask some of the 'creepers' to suggest adjectives to either describe how they are feeling looking at the creepy statues or to describe the statues themselves. Swap over so that the creepers become the statues and repeat the exercise.

Activity 2 – Creeping Statues Game

- Similar to Grandmothers footsteps. The majority of the class are the statues that they created in the freeze frame activity—but come to life.
- Practice walking as if you are made of metal or stone. How would you walk if your statue character came to life? Whole class walks silently around the room staring and statue-like.
- One person stands at one end of the room as 'Seb' (a child who is afraid of the statues) with their back turned. The statues creep towards Seb and when Seb turns around they have to freeze in a creepy pose. The first statue to reach Seb gets to be the next Seb! (Note, Seb is the name of the boy character given to the main protagonist in Little Angel Theatre's production).
- Ask each Seb how it felt to have statues creeping up behind them.

In the Little Angel Theatre production one of the statues disappears and Seb has a dream like experience when he falls into the pond—Meeting a 'Witch' in the water who he believes to be the missing statue.



THE WATCHERS

Activity 3 – A Loud Malefic Din

- In pairs discuss how people respond to fear. Run away, scream, hide, attack? Feedback suggestions.
- **Read stanza's 3–6.** How do the children in the poem respond to their fear of the statues? First they attack! How? Then they drop to the floor quivering. Why? (the noise that came from the statues)
- Look at the words 'malefic din', what does this mean?

Din – a loud, unpleasant, and prolonged noise

Malefic – causing harm or destruction, especially by supernatural means:

"She was hypnotized by the spider's malefic eyes"

(In Little Angel Theatre's production this sound is an uncomfortable high pitched squeak).

- In small groups (5 or 6 per group) ask the children to come up with one group sound that they think sounds 'malefic'. This could be a sound generated by their voices (groaning, wooooing) or by their bodies (for example rubbing their hands together, tapping) Go around each group and ask them to demonstrate their sound.
- As they demonstrate ask them to change the volume 'very quietly so we can only just hear it,' 'terrifyingly loud' etc. Use your hand as a volume control. The middle is neutral (normal talking voices level) but if you move your hand up or down they change the volume accordingly.
- Create a whole class soundscape of a noise that could have come from the statues that frightened the children. Gradually add in and take away the groups, decrease and increase the volume.
- Pick one person from each group to step out of their group and walk around reacting to the sounds – when the sounds are quieter they are braver, but when the sounds get louder they are more frightened (knees knocking, crying, dropping to the floor, as described in the poem.)
- **Read the rest of the poem (from stanza 7 to the end).**

1. What happens?
2. How do the children react?
3. How do you think this final incident impacts the children's feelings about the statues?



In Little Angel Theatre's production some of the action in this poem is represented using shadow puppetry.

THE WATCHERS

Activity 4 – Shadow Puppets Spooky Silhouettes

Materials needed: Black card/thick paper, scissors, pencils (yellow coloured pencils work well on black paper), wooden rods (BBQ skewers), glue sticks, paper, tape, coloured tissue or cellophane if you want to add coloured inserts.

Little Angel Theatre instructions for making shadow puppets
<https://youtu.be/2RyI5-B-SKw?si=CFqVYC65NjKhRZgW>

Little Angel Theatre shadow puppet example film (Moonlit Mudlark)
https://youtu.be/huQpPTs9S4U?si=hewq_XDUMV84oAXM

Instructions for making shadow puppets are on the next page of this pack and in the video link above.

- (Optional) Watch an example of a shadow puppetry film (Moonlit Mudlark in the link above is 17mins) If you are watching the Little Angel Theatre production of Tower Block there is shadow puppetry used frequently in the show, so look out for that!
- Go back over each stanza of the poem. Gather some ideas for what might need to be made to bring the poem to life using shadow puppetry:

EXAMPLE:

Stanza 1—Giant staring eyes, three statues.

Stanza 2—Three statues, rocks.

- Split the class into 6 groups. Allocate each group stanzas to focus on.

Group 1: Stanza 1

Group 2: Stanza 2 & 3

Group 3: Stanza 4 & 5

Group 4: Stanza 6

Group 5: Stanza 7, 8 & 9

Group 6: Stanza 10 & 11

- Each group makes shadow puppets for their allocated stanza's
- Perform the poem in full with each group taking responsibility for narrating and using the puppets for their specified stanzas. This could also be filmed and shared more widely.

Note: The size and scale of the puppets can vary depending on the size of your performance screen. Shadow puppets are often performed behind a screen, pressed against the screen with a light source behind. The small individual shoe box screens in the video might be too small for this project. A white sheet or basic white shower curtain can easily be rigged up on a washing line across the classroom or between upturned table legs sitting on top of standard tables. Light sources could be desk lamps or even mobile phone torches. In the Little Angel Theatre production torch light is used effectively with the torch shining from the front and the images projecting on to the screen. A plain white wall in a classroom or hall could be used with the same effect. It is fun to play around with different light and screen sources and see what works best. What happens when you move the light source or add coloured light?

SHADOW PUPPET MAKING

Materials needed: Black card/thick paper, scissors, pencils (yellow coloured pencils work well on black paper), wooden rods (BBQ skewers), glue sticks, paper, tape, coloured tissue or cellophane if you also want to add any coloured inserts.



Draw the outline of your shadow puppet on to black card. Keep the shapes simple and bold and remember that any detail like eyes will need to be cut out. Cut out the puppets including any internal details.



At this point you could add colour by using tissue paper or cellophane to cover any areas that have been cut out. Use clear tape to stick this down on the back of your puppets.



Use a small strip of paper/card and fold into a concertina of 4 sections (more detailed instructions in video). Glue the two end sections down on the back of the puppet—Insert the rod into the 2 central sections/folds and secure with tape. Your shadow puppet is now ready to use. You could also use self-adhesive velcro to attach rods to puppets, which means they can be removed and stored more easily.

GUIDED READING: THE WATCHERS

Learning Objectives: Story poems, alternate rhyming patterns, rhyming words, reading poetry with expression to create atmosphere.

Poetry Prompts #73: Writing mini story poems – YouTube

Initial Reading: Read the poem around the group, one stanza per pupil.

Discussion: This poem tells a mini story. What happens in the story? If we had to classify this story what genre would it be in? Adventure? Horror?

Can pupils identify any rhyming patterns? Note that this poem follows an alternate rhyming pattern throughout the poem with the second and fourth line of every stanza rhyming. Identify the words that rhyme. Some are full rhymes with matching letter patterns at the end and others are half rhymes. Can pupils think of any other words that rhyme with rocks? Night? etc.

Creative Response: Whole poem read again by teacher who models reading with an emphasis on using their voice (tone and volume) and facial expression to create an atmosphere that matches what is happening in the poem. How does this way of reading it help to tell the story?

Share out the stanzas amongst the group. In pairs each pupil practices reading their section with as much expression and atmosphere as possible. The other person gives feedback.

Share: Read round in the right order to deliver the whole poem. At the end each pupil says what they liked about their partners delivery, and if there is anything they could do to improve it.

Final Reading: The group reads the poem to the rest of the class, splitting the stanzas as practiced and focusing on creating an atmosphere that helps to tell the story of the poem more effectively.

LINKS AND RESOURCES

Quick reference links to some of the resources listed within the pack, as well as some additional resources that are relevant to the content of this pack.

What's on | Little Angel Theatre

Join our Schools Partnership Programme

We are excited to introduce our Schools Partnership Programme. This is an opportunity for all schools, no matter where they are located, to engage in and enjoy our work.

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1VoBcEky41tclKwS_zOE6nT9h30rkTFJr?usp=sharing
Google Drive link to design and production photos relevant to this pack

How to perform poetry – BBC Bitesize

Joe Coelho looks at how poetry can be performed, bringing the words to life rather than keeping them on the printed page.

KS1 / KS2 English: How to write poetry about your life – BBC Bitesize

Poet Joseph Coelho outlines that encouraging and sharing poems that talk about and connect to children's personal experiences is important on many levels, referring to growing up in a tower block.

Poetry Prompts #8: Go on a simile hunt – YouTube

Joseph Coelho explores and gives examples of similes.

Poetry Prompts #48: Homophones

Joseph Coelho talks homophones – and having fun writing poems with them.

Poetry Prompts #7: Fun with rhymes – YouTube

Joseph Coelho talks rhyme – and having fun writing poems with them.

Poetry Prompts #73: Writing mini story poems – YouTube

Joseph Coelho talks stories– and having fun writing poems with them.

Poetry Prompts #72: Creating sculpture poems

Joseph Coelho explores sculptures– and having fun writing poems with them.

Poetry Prompts #15: Bring your pencil case to life!

Joseph Coelho explores personification – and having fun writing poems with it.

The Poetry of Joseph Coelho – YouTube

Joseph Coelho—YouTube channel

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/charlie-cooks-favourite-book-literacy-learning-sequence/> National Literacy Trust—Classroom resources created with Little Angel Theatre inspired by Charlie Cook's Favourite book by Julia Donaldson with further ideas for creative literacy teaching.

This pack was developed and written by Sarah Schofield and Julia Josephson, with thanks to teachers from our local partner schools for their input.

Production photographs by Ellie Kurttz.

Poems reproduced from Overheard In A Tower Block (Otter-Barry Books, 2017), © Joseph Coelho 2017, used by permission of the author and the publisher