

# Experiment with Visual and Sound Effects

## Key Stage 3 > Year 7

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<b>&gt; Framework Objective W8</b> Experiment with the visual and sound effects of language, including the use of imagery, alliteration, rhythm and rhyme	<b>&gt; Framework Objective W9</b> Make links between their reading of fiction, plays and poetry and the choices they make as writers
<b>&gt; Framework Objective W2</b> Collect, select and assemble ideas in a suitable planning format	<b>&gt; Framework Objective W14</b> Describe an object, person or setting in a way that includes relevant details and is accurate and evocative

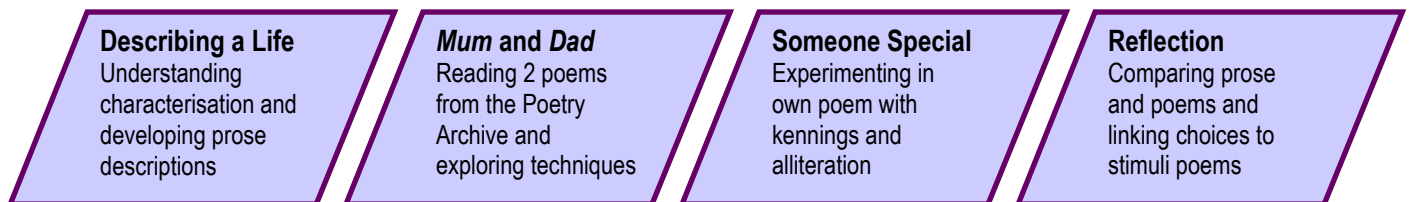
## Icon

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> [Children's Archive](#) > [All Poetic Forms Browser](#) > [Kennings](#)

## Overview

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## Introduction

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This sequence of activities is designed to form a self-contained writing project lasting several lessons. Its primary focus is on experimenting with visual and sound effects of language in poetic form, with additional work to develop a broad understanding of characterisation techniques. Its pedagogical method is to work in ways that value playful experimentation.

The tasks use creative but essentially quite traditional modes of developing writing, enhanced by the use of recordings of poets reading their work that are available on the Poetry Archive website. The activities are structured to build depth and detail, focusing on content and technique at different points. There is some scope for paired feedback and development work, modelling an important aspect of creative process.

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## Key concepts

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### Kenning

An expression (some would say “roundabout”) used instead of the straightforward name of a thing, associated with Old Norse poetry. It is a particularly imaginative and creative kind of synonymy. From the Old Norse tradition, kennings influenced Old English poetry and they are a major stylistic feature of *Beowulf*. For example, in that poem the sea is described as a whale-road. The kennings in the two poems used here are less densely imagined but in the poem “Dad”, “Biscuit Mugger” is used as an imaginative synonym for “Dad”.

### Alliteration

The repetition of a consonant sound at the beginning of two or more words in some proximity to each other. This can create a variety of sound effects according to the context, and according to the aural impact of the sound (mellifluous mumbling or barrow-boy barking). It can create patterns of sound that invite us to consider patterns of meanings; it can create a lexical web that holds us tightly in its thrall; it can create a zesty joie de vivre in its playfulness with language.

### Rhyme

The repetition of word sounds; in longer words, the repetition of the end sound e.g. reputation and obfuscation. Rhyme is not only used in poetry (it is common in advertising slogans, for example) and it is not necessarily used in poetry (free verse and blank verse make no use of it). The rhyme patterns can be placed in different sequences, known as *rhyme schemes*. For example <abab> where the first and the third lines rhyme, as do the second and the fourth. Pairs of lines that rhyme <aa> then <bb> are called *rhyming couplets*. This is the rhyme scheme used in the two poems explored here.

### Rhythm

Rhythm is the pattern of sounds in a stretch of discourse. It can occur in prose as well as poetry, and it is created through the patterning of stressed and unstressed syllables, pauses and run-ons, and the combination of different kinds of sounds (smooth or uneven). Where it works according to a regular pattern it is called *metre*, which is described by considering the structure of each repeated little chunk, called a *foot*. For example, the most common meter in Shakespeare’s plays is an iambic pentameter. Iambic means a foot of two beats, an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one. Pentameter means there are five of these little chunks in a line.

The rhythm in these two poems is partly defined by the regular meter (with a few variations for interest). This metre is, technically speaking, a trochaic dimeter, or, in simpler terms, it consists of two feet per line (dimeter), each foot consisting of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed one (trochee). There are additional rhythmic factors: note the slowing caused by the words in parenthesis in *Mum*; there is a subtle difference rhythmically between lines with two words rather than three words, though these have the same metre; and the absence of punctuation might indicate a pacy reading.

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## Activities

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### 1. Describing a Life

- Show a photograph of someone (real person) who is or has been special in your life (friend, relative or major influence) and invite students to give initial responses about their character.
- From this, invite discussion about how we can tell what a person is like. Draw out key ideas about characterisation, as in the table below.
- Model how to write brief notes into this table for the person you have chosen, thinking about how to select the most evocative details.
- Invite students to pick someone who is or has been special in their life and to complete the table as they have been shown. Pairs to review each other's notes, giving feedback on the details each finds most lively or intriguing in the other's work.
- Next have students writing short prose descriptions of their special person, using a selection of the details they have noted, discussed and developed.
- Select an interesting variety of descriptions for class reading.

### 2. Mum and Dad

- Introduce the idea that accurate and evocative prose description is only one approach we might take to character description. If you want to really arrest an audience and capture their attention and imagination with the specialness of your special person, then a special form is needed.
- Give students copies of the two poems available on the Poetry Archive website, *Mum (Polly Peters)* and *Dad*, both by Andrew Fuesk Peters. Divide the class into groups and have them working on choral readings of one of the poems, experimenting with pitch, pace, intonation, single voice, multiple voice, etc.
- Play the recordings of the poets reading these poems and invite immediate responses: how did the poets' readings compare with your own? How did each poem make you think or feel?
- Display the poems and work through together, listing in more prosaic terms the qualities of the "Mum" and "Dad" of the poems. Then consider the techniques by which the writers have made these prosaic qualities sparky and arresting. Explore rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, and the idea of kennings. Colour code some examples of these techniques.
- Select someone everyone knows (the headteacher? A character from a class novel? A film star? Homer Simpson?), list half a dozen characteristics, and then practise writing some kennings together. Encourage creativity, quirkiness and imagination.
- Review the kennings produced, invite the class to select the best and display these.

### 3. Someone Special

- Listen again to the recordings of *Mum* and *Dad* on the Poetry Archive website.
- Have students work through their notes on their special person, trying out alliteration and kennings for each quality, adding and developing as desired.
- Pair review of each others' work, trying out phrases and kennings. Feedback to focus on how each person could make their special person seem more special through the specialness of the language. Revise in the light of new ideas.
- Next students work some kennings into rhyming couplets. Encourage paired problem solving.
- Then try sequencing couplets into a poem, and adding a start and a finish in the same format as the two stimulus poems. Encourage students to try out several versions, thinking about overall rhythm and pace, and listening again to the recordings for ideas before producing a final draft.

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- Finish with a rehearsal of readings of the poems which capture the tone and energy of the poem: give it a twist by getting pairs to rehearse and perform each other's poems.

### 4. Links

- Finish with spoken and/or written reflection on how their poem compares with their prose description, and how the choices they made as poets linked to their reading of the two poems

## Variations

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- You could try some voice activities to develop students' "feel" for kennings. Put the kennings from one or both of the poems onto cards and start by having students say them aloud, in a random order. Do this a couple of times, encouraging different ways of saying their kenning. Then try adding a gesture as they say it. You could then put the kennings in sequence and have them read in sequence, with gestures, putting the whole poem together as a performed collaborative reading.
- You could extend this work for some or all students with a look at some kennings from *Beowulf*, using the Seamus Heaney translation for accessibility, and Old English for marvel, challenge and awareness of language change

## Other resources

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- *Beowulf: A New Translation*, by Seamus Heaney, available as book and audiobook read by Heaney

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<b>Characterisation Technique</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Your Special Person</b>
The things other people think or say about him/her		
Clothes and accessories		
Physical appearance		
Habits and mannerisms		
Contrasts and comparisons with other people		
What s/he typically says		
The way s/he speaks		
What s/he typically thinks or feels		
Actions		
The environment s/he is most comfortable in		