



The Watford Festival

OF MUSIC, SPEECH AND DRAMA

SET POETRY 2025

S0 - Reception year & under

Magic

Sandra's seen a leprechaun,
Eddie touched a troll,
Laurie danced with witches once,
Charlie found some goblins' gold.
Donald heard a mermaid sing,
Susy spied an elf,
But all the magic I have known
I've had to make myself.

Shel Silverstein

My Shell

there is a shell
alone on a beach
over the sand-dunes
out of my reach

it calls to me softly
whispers my name
says. 'come, won't you find me?'
always the same

one day I will see it
half-buried in sand
and hold it up proud
in the palm of my hand

we'll sing of the sun
and the salt and the sea
together forever
just my shell and me

And Suddenly Spring

The winds of March were sleeping.
I hardly felt a thing.
The trees were standing quietly.
It didn't seem like spring.
Then suddenly the winds awoke
And raced across the sky.
They bumped right into April,
Splashing springtime in my eye.

Matt Goodfellow

Margaret Hillert



A Frog in a Well Explains the World

The world is round
and deep
and cool.
The bottom of the world's
a pool
with just enough room
for a frog alone.
The walls of the world
are of stone on stone.
At the top of the world,
when I look up high,
I can see a star
in a little round sky.

Alice Schertle

Crick, Crack, Crocodile!

Crick, crack, crocodile,
what bright shiny teeth,
what a fierce, dark smile.

I wouldn't like to meet you
when you're hungry or sad.
I'd shout: *Mr Crocodile,*
I taste very bad.

But I'd be glad to see you
in your jungle, by the river –
strong tail, scaly back,
handsome water-dragon.

Crick, crack, crick, crack, **snap!**

Joan Poulson

Ten Things Found in a Wizard's Pocket

A dark night.
Some words that nobody could ever spell.
A glass of water full to the top.
A large elephant.
A vest made from spiders' webs.
A handkerchief the size of a car park.
A bill from the wand shop.
A bucket full of stars and planets, to mix with the dark night.
A bag of magic mints you can suck for ever.
A snoring rabbit.

Ian McMillan



Flint

An emerald is as green as grass,
A ruby red as blood;
A sapphire shines as blue as heaven;
A flint lies in the mud.

A diamond is a brilliant stone,
To catch the world's desire;
An opal holds a fiery spark;
But a flint holds fire.

Christina Rossetti

How to Get There

I go
through Sunday's tunnel, hushed and deep;
up Monday's mountain, craggy and steep;
along Tuesday's trail, winding and slow;
into Wednesday's woods, still halfway to go;
over Thursday's bridge, shaky and tall;
through the hidden gate in Friday's wall
to get to
SATURDAY.

I wish there was a shorter way.

Bonnie Nims

It's Only the Storm

'What's that creature that rattles the roof?'
'Hush, it's only the storm.'

'What's blowing the tiles and the branches off?'
'Hush, it's only the storm.'

'What's riding the sky like a wild white horse,
Flashing its teeth and stamping its hooves?'

'Hush, my dear, it's only the storm,
Racing the darkness till it catches the dawn.
Hush, my dear, it's only the storm,
When you wake in the morning, it will be gone.'

David Greygoose



Country Cat

'Where are you going, Mrs Cat,
All by your lonesome lone?'
'Hunting a mouse, or maybe a rat
Where the ditches are overgrown.'

'But you're very far from your house and home,
You've come a long, long way —'
'The further I wander, the longer I roam
The more I find mice at play.'

'But you're very near to the dark pinewood
And foxes go hunting too.'
'I know that a fox might find me good
But what is a cat to do?'

'I have my kittens who must be fed,
I *can't* have them skin and bone!'
And Mrs Cat shook her brindled head
And went off by her lonesome lone.

Elizabeth Coatsworth

Sergeant Brown's Parrot

Many policemen wear upon their shoulders
Cunning little radios. To pass away the time
They talk about the traffic to them, listen to the news,
And it helps them to Keep Down Crime.

But Sergeant Brown, he wears upon his shoulder
A tall green parrot as he's walking up and down
And all the parrot says is "Who's-a-pretty-boy-then?"
"I am," says Sergeant Brown.

Kit Wright

Sand

I believe in sand
because of its thousand whispers
held in my hands,

because of a starfish
worn like a brooch
and earring shells,

and the way it frowns
when the tide goes out,
and its seaweed smell.

I believe in sand
because of its magic castle
made by my hands,

because of a name
scored with a stick
at the edge of the tide,

and the salty lace
at the throat of a wave
where dolphins ride.

I believe in sand
because of the secret water
dug by my hands,

because of the footprints
leading away, leading away
to other lands,
I believe in sand.

Carol Ann Duffy



The Hippopotamus's Birthday

He has opened all his parcels
but the largest and the last;
His hopes are at their highest
and his heart is beating fast.
O happy Hippopotamus,
what lovely gift is here?
He cuts the string. The world stands still.
A pair of boots appear!

O little Hippopotamus,
the sorrows of the small!
He dropped two tears to mingle
with the flowing Senegal;
And the 'Thank you' that he uttered
was the saddest ever heard
In the Senegambian jungle
from the mouth of beast or bird.

E V Rieu

The Old Field

The old field is sad
Now the children have gone home.
They have played with him all afternoon,
Kicking the ball to him, and him
Kicking it back.

But now it is growing cold and dark.
He thinks of their warm breath, and their
Feet like little hot-water bottles.
A bit rough, some of them, but still...

And now, he thinks, there's not even a dog
To tickle me.
The gates are locked.
The birds don't like this nasty sneaking wind,
And nor does he.

D J Enright

Winter is a Wolf

Winter is a
drowsy wolf

full of summer sleep.
He'll awaken and arise
when the hunger in his eyes
grows ravenous and deep.

Winter is a
clever wolf

You will see him creep
down the wind's way
sly and slow
in a suit of fleecy snow
pretending he's a sheep.

Winter is a
magic wolf

no man-made cage can keep.
Crouching low on padded paws,
licking his enormous jaws,
earthward he will leap.

Grace Cornell Tall



The Word Party

Loving words clutch crimson roses,
Rude words sniff and pick their noses,
Sly words come dressed up as foxes.
Short words stand on cardboard boxes,
Common words tell jokes and gabble,
Complicated words play Scrabble,
Swear words stamp around and shout,
Hard words stare each other out,
Foreign words look lost and shrug,
Careless words trip on the rug,
Long words slouch with stooping shoulders,
Code words carry secret folders,
Silly words flick rubber bands,
Hyphenated words hold hands,
Strong words show off, bending metal,
Sweet words call each other 'petal',
Small words yawn and suck their thumbs,
Till at last the morning comes.
Kind words give out farewell posies...
Snap! The dictionary closes.

Richard Edwards

Books Have Helped Me

Books have more images between their words
than any smart phone could hold.
More flavours than a thousand jelly beans.
More lives for you to live
than any computer game.

Books have helped me.

I've read about characters
who have laughed, cried and sighed like me.

Characters who have battled
monsters larger than any I could imagine.

Characters who have travelled distances longer
than there are miles between me and the sun.

When I thumb through a book
their pages whisper to me
that I'll be all right.

Joseph Coelho

Lucky Star

Rich or poor or low or high,
No matter who you are,
Somewhere or other in the sky
You have got a lucky star.

If you find a penny or lose a cold,
Or get a lift in a car,
Or live to be a hundred years old,
You can thank your lucky star.

If you sit by the fire when the blizzard squalls,
If you journey to Zanzibar,
If you're out when your Aunt Jemima calls,
You may thank your lucky star.

If you are left in the breakfast-room
Alone with the honey-jar,
If the bulbs you planted in winter bloom
In spring, thank your lucky star.

If you see the new moon swinging light,
If you hear two owls afar
Question-and-answering in the night,
You must thank your lucky star.

If something is there, whatever you do,
To make what else you'd mar,
And carry you over, and see you through,
You were born with a lucky star.

Eleanor Farjeon



Pencil Me In

I know a pencil
Full of lead,
It knows the thoughts
Within my head,
It knows my secrets
And my fears,
It draws a line
Right through my tears.
I know a pencil
Old and grey,
Willing to work
Both night and day,
Fat and lovely
Light and fine,
It moves with me
Through space and time.

Be they good
Or be they bad,
It tells of all
The dreams I have,
And when I have
No oar to row
It writes a way
And lets me go.
When baby words
Are crying loud,
It touches words
And makes me proud,
A work of art
It is no fake,
It really has
A point to make.

This pencil sees
The best in me,
The worst
And all the rest
Of me,
And as I go
Through puberty,
It changes all my
Poetry.
It goes with me
On all my tours,
It fought with me
In all word wars,
And peacefully
This pencil tries
To help me learn
And make me wise.

Every pencil needs a hand
And every mind needs to expand,
I know a pencil,
What you see
Is me and it
In harmony.

Benjamin Zephaniah



If I Were in Charge of the World

If I were in charge of the world
I'd cancel oatmeal,
Monday mornings,
Allergy shots, and also Sara Steinberg.

If I were in charge of the world
There'd be brighter night lights,
Healthier hamsters, and
Basketball baskets forty eight inches lower.

If I were in charge of the world
You wouldn't have lonely.
You wouldn't have clean.
You wouldn't have bedtimes.
Or "Don't punch your sister."
You wouldn't even have sisters.

If I were in charge of the world
A chocolate sundae with whipped cream and
nuts would be a vegetable
All 007 movies would be G,
And a person who sometimes forgot to brush,
And sometimes forgot to flush,
Would still be allowed to be
In charge of the world.

Judith Viorst

Jack Frost is Playing Cards at the Roadside

Jack Frost
Is playing cards with the leaves.
He has spread them out in front of him
And is turning them over one by one,
Telling the Earth's fortune.

Which creatures
Will not wake from hibernation.

Which bulbs
Will burst with cold.

Which plants
Will melt away.

Jack Frost
Sits beside the roadside,
Lonely as ever.
On a twig behind him
A sparrow is sitting mute with cold,
And everything is still and quiet,
Still and quiet.

Across the valley is a village
And the roofs of its little houses
Steam in the morning light,
Which is cold and brief.
And over its inhabitants
Soon clouds will come,
And a net of shadows descend,
And Jack Frost

Will put away his cards,
And the whiteness will pass
And vanish from the grass.

Brian Patten



November Evening

Now in November evenings,
When thick dark falls,
Filling our lanes, and turning
All mortals into moles,

No moon or stars, no glimmer
Of lamp, nor means to tell
Hedge from house or haystack
But by feet and smell,

Glow in my remembering,
Sounds in my inward ear,
The rattle of dry blown leaves
In a lit, London square,

And the dim gleam of lamplight
On leaf-discarding trees
Mingles with urban magic
These rural secrecies.

Gerald Bullett

About Standing (in Kinship)

We all have the same little bones in our foot
twenty-six with funny names like *navicular*.
Together they build something strong—
our foot arch a pyramid holding us up.
The bones don't get casts when they break.
We tape them—one *phalange* to its neighbor for support.
(Other things like sorrow work that way, too—
find healing in the leaning, the closeness.)
Our feet have one quarter of all the bones in our body.
Maybe we should give more honor to feet
and to all those tiny but blessed cogs in the world—
communities, the forgotten architecture of friendship.

Kimberly Blaeser

Overheard on a Saltmarsh

Nymph, nymph, what are your beads?
Green glass, goblin. Why do you stare at them?

Give them me.

No.

Give them me. Give them me.

No.

Then I will howl all night in the reeds,
Lie in the mud and howl for them.

Goblin, why do you love them so?

They are better than stars or water,
Better than voices of winds that sing,
Better than any man's fair daughter,
Your green glass beads on a silver ring.

Hush, I stole them out of the moon.

Give me your beads, I desire them.

No.

I will howl in a deep lagoon
For your green glass beads, I love them so.
Give them me. Give them.

No.

Harold Monro



Stage Directions for Bluebells

OK. Everyone else off-stage –
 we'll just have bluebells for this one.
 Lilac? Don't fire your torches yet.
 Daisies? Just stay folded, will you?
 Now. Bluebells. Can we all be up-
 standing? That's it. Spread yourselves
 about a bit. Use the whole stage.
 What d'you think we've got all this green
 foliage for? Nice! Nice! Now families –
 over on the right, please. And you two –
 could you appear to be in conversation,
 or at least on nodding acquaintance? No,
 there's no need to be facetious. You don't
 have to ring. Solitaires? Nestle in the shade
 among the ferns and ivies. No, you can't
 have extra lighting. It's contrast we're after.
 OK. You shy, flirty ones – over by the wall.
 Peep through the peonies. Can you tremble?
Very nice! Miss Precocious? By the rose.
 Now. You extras. All right, all righty,
individuals. We're running out of space here.
 Do what you can with the cracks in the path.
 Yes, I realize you might get trampled on –
 that's just a risk you've got to take.
 Lovely! Lovely! You all look very picturesque.
 OK. That's it! Hold it! Hold it!
 We'll call it 'Late April in England, with
 bluebells'.

Dinah Hendry

The Song of the Mischievous Dog

There are many who say that a dog has its day,
 And a cat has a number of lives;
 There are others who think that a lobster is pink,
 And that bees never work in their hives.
 There are fewer, of course, who insist that a horse
 Has a horn and two humps on its head,
 And a fellow who jests that a mare can build nests
 Is as rare as a donkey that's red.
 Yet in spite of all this, I have moments of bliss,
 For I cherish a passion for bones,
 And though doubtful of biscuit, I'm willing to risk it,
 And I love to chase rabbits and stones.
 But my greatest delight is to take a good bite
 At a calf that is plump and delicious;
 And if I indulge in a bite at a bulge,
 Let's hope you won't think me too vicious.

Dylan Thomas

Casting a Spell

Learn a spell. It takes some time
 First you must have the gift of rhyme,
 New images, a melody.
 Verse will do but poetry
 Sometimes will come if you have luck.
 Play tunes, blow trumpets, learn to pluck
 The harp. The best of spells are cast
 When you have written words to last,
 Rich in subtle rhythms and
 Right words which most will understand.
 Casting a spell's a secret skill
 Which few learn fast. No act of will
 On your part hands the gift to you.
 Words must surprise and yet ring true.
 False sorcerers are everywhere
 But the true magic's deep and rare.

Elizabeth Jennings



The Moment

To write down all I contain at this moment
I would pour the desert through an hour-glass,
The sea through a water-clock,
Grain by grain and drop by drop
Let in the trackless, measureless, mutable seas and sands.

For earth's days and nights are breaking over me
The tides and sands are running through me,
And I have only two hands and a heart to hold
the desert and the sea.

What can I contain of it? It escapes and eludes me
The tides wash me away
The desert shifts under my feet.

Kathleen Raine

About Ben Adhem

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,
An angel writing in a book of gold: –
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
And to the presence in the room he said,
'What writest thou?' – The vision raised its head,
And with a look made of all sweet accord,
Answered, 'The names of those who love the Lord.'
'And is mine one?' said Abou. 'Nay, not so,'
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,
But cheerly still; and said, 'I pray thee, then,
Write me as one that loves his fellow men.'

The angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
It came again with a great wakening light,
And showed the names whom love of God had blest,
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.

The Lake Isle of Innisfree

Leigh Hunt

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

William Butler Yeats



The Squirrel

Among the fox-red fallen leaves I surprised him. Snap
 Up the chestnut bole he leapt,
 The brown leaper, clawing up-swept:
 Turned on the first bough and scolded me roundly.
 That's right, load me with reviling,
 Spit at me, swear horrible, shame me if you can.
 But scared of my smiling
 Off and up he scurries. Now Jack's up the beanstalk
 Among the dizzy giants. He skips
 Along the highest branches, along
 Tree-fingers slender as string,
 Fur tail following, to the very tips:
 Then leaps the aisle -
 O fear he fall
 A hundred times his little length!
 He's over! clings, swings on a spray,
 Then lightly, the ghost of a mouse, against the sky traces
 For me his runway of rare wonder, races
 Helter-skelter without pause or break
 (I think of the snail – how long would he take?)
 On and onward, not done yet –
 His errand? some nut-plunder, you bet.
 Oh he's gone!
 I peer and search and strain for him, but he's gone.
 I wait and watch at the giants' feet, among
 The fox-red fallen leaves. One drop
 Of rain lands with a smart tap
 On the drum, on parchment leaf. I wait
 And wait and shiver and forget...

A fancy: suppose these trees, so ancient, so
 Venerable, so rock-rooted, suddenly
 Heaved up their huge elephantine hooves
 (O the leaves, how they'd splutter and splash
 Like a waterfall, a red waterfall) – suppose
 They trudged away!
 What would the squirrel say?

Ian Serraillier

Filling Station

Oh, but it is dirty!
 – this little filling station,
 oil-soaked, oil-permeated
 to a disturbing, over-all
 black translucency.
 Be careful with that match!

Father wears a dirty,
 oil-soaked monkey suit
 that cuts him under the arms,
 and several quick and saucy
 and greasy sons assist him
 (it's a family filling station),
 all quite thoroughly dirty.

Do they live in the station?
 It has a cement porch
 behind the pumps, and on it
 a set of crushed and grease-
 impregnated wickerwork;
 on the wicker sofa
 a dirty dog, quite comfy.

Some comic books provide
 the only note of color –
 of certain color. They lie
 upon a big dim doily
 draping a taboret
 (part of the set), beside
 a big hirsute begonia.

Why the extraneous plant?
 Why the taboret?
 Why, oh why, the doily?
 (Embroidered in daisy stitch
 with marguerites, I think,
 and heavy with gray crochet.)

Somebody embroidered the doily.
 Somebody waters the plant,
 or oils it, maybe. Somebody
 arranges the rows of cans
 so that they softly say:
 ESSO–SO–SO–SO
 to high-strung automobiles.
 Somebody loves us all.

Elizabeth Bishop



Cat in an Empty Apartment

Die—you can't do that to a cat.
Since what can a cat do
in an empty apartment?
Climb the walls?
Rub up against the furniture?
Nothing seems different here
but nothing is the same.
Nothing's been moved
but there's more space.
And at nighttime no lamps are lit.

Footsteps on the staircase,
but they're new ones.
The hand that puts fish on the saucer
has changed, too.

Something doesn't start
at its usual time.
Something doesn't happen
as it should.
Someone was always, always here,
then suddenly disappeared
and stubbornly stays disappeared.

Every closet's been examined.
Every shelf has been explored.
Excavations under the carpet turned up nothing.
A commandment was even broken:
papers scattered everywhere.
What remains to be done.
Just sleep and wait.

Just wait till he turns up,
just let him show his face.
Will he ever get a lesson
on what not to do to a cat.
Sidle toward him
as if unwilling
and ever so slow
on visibly offended paws,
and no leaps or squeals
at least to start.

Wisława Szymborska

*translated from the Polish
by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh*

S0 – Reception Year and Under		
<i>My Shell – Matt Goodfellow</i>	<i>Caterpillar Cake</i>	Otter-Barry Books, 2021
<i>And Suddenly Spring – Margaret Hillert</i>	<i>A Cup of Starshine</i>	Walker Books, 1991
<i>Magic – Shel Silverstein</i>	<i>Where the Sidewalk Ends</i>	Harper & Row, 1974
S1 – School Year 1		
<i>A Frog in a Well Explains the World – Alice Schertle</i>	<i>Forget-Me-Nots: Poems to Learn by Heart</i>	Little, Brown Young Readers, 2012
<i>Crick, Crack, Crocodile! – Joan Poulson</i>	https://childrens.poetryarchive.org/poem/crick-crack-crocodile	
<i>Ten Things Found in a Wizard's Pocket – Ian McMillan</i>	<i>The Works</i>	Macmillan, 2000
S2 – School Year 2		
<i>It's Only the Storm – David Greygoose</i>	<i>The Oxford Book of Children's Poetry</i>	Oxford University Press, 2007
<i>How to Get There – Bonnie Nims</i>	https://blog.lrei.org/ls-poetry-archive/how-to-get-there-bonnie-nims	
<i>Flint – Christina Rossetti</i>	<i>100 Best Poems for Children</i>	Puffin Books, 2002
S3 – School Year 3		
<i>Country Cat – Elizabeth Coatsworth</i>	<i>The Young Puffin Book of Verse</i>	Puffin Books, 1970
<i>Sand – Carol Ann Duffy</i>	<i>Carol Ann Duffy: new and collected poems for children</i>	Faber & Faber, 2009
<i>Sergeant Brown's Parrot – Kit Wright</i>	https://poemsontheunderground.org/sergeant-browns-parrot	
S4 – School Year 4		
<i>Winter is a Wolf – Grace Cornell Tall</i>	<i>A Cup of Starshine</i>	Walker Books, 1991
<i>The Old Field – D. J. Enright</i>	<i>Rhyme Time</i>	Hamlyn Publishing, 1977
<i>The Hippopotamus's Birthday – E. V. Rieu</i>	<i>I Like This Poem</i>	Puffin Books, 1979
S5 – School Year 5		
<i>Books Have Helped Me – Joseph Coelho</i>	<i>Overheard in a Tower Block</i>	Otter-Barry Books, 2017
<i>The Word Party – Richard Edwards</i>	<i>100 Best Poems for Children</i>	Puffin Books, 2002
<i>Lucky Star – Eleanor Farjeon</i>	<i>Then There Were Three</i>	Michael Joseph, 1958
S6 – School Year 6		
<i>Jack Frost is Playing Cards at the Roadside – Brian Patten</i>	<i>The Works</i>	Macmillan, 2000
<i>If I Were in Charge of the World – Judith Viorst</i>	<i>If I Were in Charge of the World and Other Worries</i>	Atheneum Books, 1984
<i>Pencil Me In – Benjamin Zephaniah</i>	<i>The Works</i>	Macmillan, 2000
S7 – School Year 7		
<i>About Standing (In Kinship) – Kimberly Blaeser</i>	www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/155518/about-standing-in-kinship	
<i>November Evening – Gerald Bullett</i>	<i>100 Best Poems for Children</i>	Puffin Books, 2002
<i>Overheard on a Saltmarsh – Harold Monro</i>	<i>100 Best Poems for Children</i>	Puffin Books, 2002
S8 – School Year 8		
<i>Stage Directions for Bluebells – Dinah Hendry</i>	<i>The Works</i>	Macmillan, 2000
<i>Casting a Spell – Elizabeth Jennings</i>	<i>A Spell of Words</i>	Macmillan, 1997
<i>The Song of the Mischievous Dog – Dylan Thomas</i>	www.panmacmillan.com/blogs/literary/dylan-thomas-welsh-poems	
S9 – School Years 9 and 10		
<i>Abou Ben Adhem – Leigh Hunt</i>	<i>100 Best Poems for Children</i>	Puffin Books, 2002
<i>The Moment – Kathleen Raine</i>	<i>The Oxford Book of Children's Poetry</i>	Oxford University Press, 2007
<i>The Lake Isle of Innisfree – W. B. Yeats</i>	<i>I am the Seed that Grew the Tree</i>	Nosy Crow, 2018
S10 – School Years 11 - 13		
<i>Filling Station – Elizabeth Bishop</i>	www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52193/filling-station	
<i>Cat in an Empty Apartment – Wisława Szymborska</i>	https://readingearth.blog/56-2/	
<i>The Squirrel – Ian Serraillier</i>	<i>LAMDA anthology of verse and prose volume VI</i>	LAMDA, 1966