

WATFORD FESTIVAL SET POETRY 2027

S0 – RECEPTION YEAR & UNDER

The Scorpion

The scorpion is as black as soot,
He dearly loves to bite;
He is a most unpleasant brute
To find in bed, at night.

Hilaire Belloc

Elephants

Elephants
aren't any more important
than insects
but I'm on the side
of elephants
unless one of them tries
to crawl up my leg

John Newlove

Oh to be

Oh to be a broken leg
In plaster white as chalk
And travel everywhere by crutch
While others have to walk.

Mike Griffin

S1 – SCHOOL YEAR 1

Chips

Out of the paper bag
Comes the hot breath of the chips
And I shall blow on them
To stop them burning my lips.

Before I leave the counter
The woman shakes
Raindrops of vinegar on them
And salty snowflakes.

Outside the frosty pavements
Are slippery as a slide
But the chips and I
Are warm inside.

Stanley Cook

New Sights

I like to see a thing I know
Has not been seen before,
That's why I cut my apple through
To look into the core.

It's nice to think, though many an eye
Has seen the ruddy skin,
Mine is the very first to spy
The five brown pips within.

Anon

The Coat

I patched my coat with sunlight.
It lasted for a day.

I patched my coat with moonlight,
But the lining came away.

I patched my coat with lightning
And it flew off in a storm

I patched my coat with darkness:
That coat has kept me warm.

Dennis Lee

S2 – SCHOOL YEAR 2

Bedtime

Five minutes, five minutes more, please!
Let me stay five minutes more!
Can't I just finish the castle
I'm building here on the floor?
Can't I just finish the story
I'm reading here in my book?
Can't I just finish this bead-chain -
It almost is finished, look!
Can't I just finish this game, please?
When a game's once begun
It's a pity never to find out
Whether you've lost or won.
Can't I just stay five minutes?
Well, can't I stay just four?
Three minutes, then? Two minutes?
Can't I stay one minute more?

Eleanor Farjeon

New Shoes

My shoes are new and squeaky shoes,
They're very shiny, creaky shoes,
I wish I had my leaky shoes
That Mother threw away.

I liked my old, brown, leaky shoes
Much better than these creaky shoes,
These shiny, creaky, squeaky shoes
I've got to wear today.

Anon

Poem for the Last Day of Football Season

Dreams in tatters
Hopes in rags
Blown away
Like paper bags

Early exits
From each cup
My team down
Your team up

Shadows lengthen
The worst I fear
But I'll be back
Same time next year.

Paul Cookson

S3 – SCHOOL YEAR 3

It's not my Fault

It's not my fault
It isn't fair
It's not my gum
In Jenny's hair

It wasn't me
I didn't do it
The brick was his
I know he threw it

I wasn't there
What broken dish?
It's not my turn
To feed the fish

What missing sweets?
Which chocolate cake?
I didn't push her
In the lake

It isn't fair
Why pick on me?
When I leave school
Just wait and see

John Kitching

If You're No Good at Cooking

If you're no good at cooking,
Can't fry or bake,

Here's something you
Can always make. Take

Three very ordinary
Slices of bread:

Stack the second
On the first one's head.

Stack the third
On top of that.

There! Your three slices
Lying flat.

So what have you got?
A BREAD SANDWICH,

That's what!
Why not?

Kit Wright

Monday

Monday; not only that but it's pouring;
My friend's away and that'll be boring;
Games are off, in Maths there's a test -
It's a day when I never do my best.
No one thinks it's a bumper-fun day -
So why don't we simply cancel Monday?

It's a day when teachers speak a faceful:
'This work is really quite disgraceful!'
And Monday lunch just breaks your heart:
It's green grub salad and concrete tart.
It's Monday again, a proper blues day:
Couldn't we just begin on Tuesday?

Eric Finney

S4 – SCHOOL YEAR 4

Elastic Jones

Elastic Jones had rubber bones.
He could bounce up and down like a ball.
When he was six, one of his tricks
Was jumping a ten-foot wall.

As the years went by, Elastic would try
To jump higher, and higher, and higher.
He amazed people by jumping a steeple,
Though he scratched his behind on the spire!

But, like many a star, he went too far,
Getting carried away with his power.
He boasted one day, 'Get out of my way,
I'm going to jump Blackpool Tower.'

He took off from near the end of the pier,
But he slipped and crashed into the top.
Amid cries and groans, Elastic Jones
Fell into the sea with a plop.

John Foster

Enough to Make you Sick

What if every day you ate
Food of twice your body-weight?
That is what the Pygmy Shrew
(Just to stay alive) must do.
Think what it would mean to you.

Seven bucketfuls of chips,
Several dozen Instant Whips,
Twenty packs of Shredded Wheat, Thirty
tins of luncheon meat
That is what you'd have to eat.

Plus six chickens, and a ham,
Forty-seven pots of jam,
Fifty bars of Milky Way.
All that in a single day!
'Lovely!' did I hear you say?

Thank your lucky stars that you
Were not born a Pygmy Shrew.

Dick King-Smith

Why?

Superman can fly.
Why can't I?
Popeye can swim,
But I'm not him.
Paddington's a bear -
It's not fair!

Why should all the people on TV
Have so much more fun than me?

Why can Mr Bounce tumble?
Why can Miss Piggy sing?
Why can a Womble womble?
When I can't do anything?

If you didn't know the answer,
you'd want to cry.
I do know the answer. They're not real.
I am. That's why.

Gyles Brandreth

S5 – SCHOOL YEAR 5

Favouritism

When we caught measles
It wasn't fair -
My brother collected
Twice his share.

He counted my spots:
"One hundred and twenty!"
Which sounded to me
As if I had plenty.

Then I counted his -
And what do you think?
He'd two hundred and thirty-eight,
Small, round and pink!

I felt I'd been cheated
So "Count mine again!"
I told him, and scowled
So he dared not complain.

"One hundred and twenty" -
The same as before ...
In our house, he's youngest
And he always gets more!

Trevor Harvey

Because of Number One

I'll tell you something funny -
The strangest thing under the sun.
There's never an end to numbers,
Because of Number One.

You think you're clever when you count to twenty -
But then there's twenty-one.
So on you go, and thirty comes -
And then comes thirty-one!

You reach a hundred! Then you think
That all your counting's done.
But no! A little voice inside
Says, "Now a hundred-and-one!"

You reach a thousand! Number One
Insists on going on.
You're all worn out. A million comes:
But there's still "A million-and-one".

The person who caused all this trouble
(when I could be out having fun)
Is the man who lived in the dim distant past
And invented Number One!

Pam Gidney

Homework

Who invented homework?
What is it all for?
I already do enough in class
Why give me any more?

When I get back home
I want to be free,
I just want to put my feet up
and watch a little TV.

I work hard all day,
And deserve a rest
If they give me so much to do
How can I do my best?

I've heard their excuses
And I think they're poor
You need to study on your own.
What on earth for?

My dad has a job
in an office all day.
If work was waiting for him at home,
I know what he would say!

There is just one thing
That might change my view
And that's if they paid us overtime!
Wouldn't that suit you, too?

Ray Mather

S6 – SCHOOL YEAR 6

Midnight Wood

Dark in the wood the shadows stir:

What do you see? -

Mist and moonlight, star and cloud,
Hunchback shapes that creep and crowd
From tree to tree.

Dark in the wood a thin wind calls:

What do you hear? -

Froned and fern and clutching grass
Snigger at you as you pass,
Whispering fear.

Dark in the wood a river flows:

What does it hide? -

Otter, water-rat, old tin can,
Bones of fish and bones of a man
Drift in its tide.

Dark in the wood the owlets shriek:

What do they cry? -

Choose between the wood and river;
Who comes here is lost forever,
And must die!

Raymond Wilson

The Snowman

Mother, while you were at the shops
and I was snoozing in my chair
I heard a tap at the window
saw a snowman standing there

He looked so cold and miserable
I almost could have cried
so I put the kettle on
and invited him inside

I made him a cup of cocoa
to warm the cockles of his nose
then he snuggled in front of the fire
for a cosy little doze

He lay there warm and smiling
softly counting sheep
I eavesdropped for a little while
then I too fell asleep

Seems he awoke and tiptoed out
exactly when I'm not too sure
it's a wonder you didn't see him
as you came in through the door

(oh, and by the way,
the kitten's made a puddle on the floor)

Roger McGough

I'd Like to be a Teabag

I'd like to be a teabag,
And stay at home all day -
And talk to other teabags
In a teabag sort of way...

I'd love to be a teabag,
And lie in a little box -
And never have to wash my face
Or change my dirty socks ...

I'd like to be a teabag,
An Earl Grey one perhaps,
And doze all day and lie around
With Earl Grey kind of chaps.

I wouldn't have to do a thing,
No homework, jobs or chores -
Comfy in my caddy
Of teabags and their snores.

I wouldn't have to do exams,
I needn't tidy rooms,
Or sweep the floor or feed the cat
Or wash up all the spoons.

I wouldn't have to do a thing,
A life of bliss - you see ...
Except that once in all my life

I'd make a cup of tea!

Peter Dixon

S7 – SCHOOL YEAR 7 (1 of 2)

The Ghoul

The gruesome ghoul, the grisly ghoul,
without the slightest noise
waits patiently beside the school
to feast on girls and boys.

He lunges fiercely through the air
as they come out to play,
then grabs a couple by the hair
and drags them far away.

He cracks their bones and snaps their backs
and squeezes out their lungs,
he chews their thumbs like candy snacks
and pulls apart their tongues.

He slices their stomachs and bites their hearts
and tears their flesh to shreds,
he swallows their toes like toasted tarts
And gobbles down their heads.

Fingers, elbows, hands and knees
and arms and legs and feet -
he eats them with delight and ease,
for every part's a treat.

And when the gruesome, grisly ghoul
has nothing left to chew,
he hurries to another school
and waits ... perhaps for you.

Jack Prelutsky

Give Up Slimming, Mum

My Mum
is short
and plump
and pretty
and I wish she'd give up
slimming.

So does Dad

Her cooking's
delicious -
you can't
beat it
but you really can
hardly bear
to eat it -
the way she sits with her eyes
brimming,

watching you
polish off
the spuds
and trimmings
while she
has nothing
herself but a small
thin dry
diet biscuit:
that's all.

My Mum
is short
and plump
and pretty
and I wish she'd give up
slimming.

So does Dad.

She says she
looks as though
someone had
sat on her
BUT WE LIKE MUM
WITH A BIT
OF FAT ON HER!

Kit Wright

S7 – SCHOOL YEAR 7 (2 of 2)

How to Ask for a Hamster

Mum, can I keep a snake in my room?
What did you say? Are you mad?
Well, Jamie keeps a snake in his room,
He got it from his dad.

Will you buy me a mongoose, Mum?
I've played with one; it belongs to Maria,
It's really docile; can I please, Mum?
I don't think that's a good idea!

Can I have a pony then?
I could afford to pay for hay.
D'you know how much a pony costs?
Japhet got one for his birthday.

How about a crocodile?
They sell them in Didcot,
I think that's where Chloe bought hers.
Can I have one? *Certainly not!*

I'll settle for a tarantula then,
It would be in a cage, of course.
Joshua has a tarantula.
Oh no! I can think of nothing worse!

What about a little monkey?
Tina has a chimpanzee.
Everyone in class has a pet,
Everybody except me.

*You can have a cat or a hamster,
You cannot have a snake or a mouse.
No crocs, monkey or creepy-crawlies,
I won't have a zoo in this house.*

OK, I'll settle for a hamster,
It's better than nothing, I suppose.
Oh, there's the bell, must be Jamie,
We promised to go and play at Joe's.

Jamie, you were right, I tried it,
Just like you said, it worked a treat,
I'm getting the hamster, now tell me
How do I ask for a parakeet?

Valerie Bloom

S8 – SCHOOL YEAR 8 (1 of 2)

Dear Mr Examiner

Thank you so much for your questions
I've read them most carefully through
But there isn't a single one of them
That I know the answer to.

I've written my name as instructed
Put the year, the month and the day
But after I'd finished doing that
I had nothing further to say.

So I thought I'd write you a letter
Fairly informally
About what I can see from my desk here
And what it's like to be me.

Mandy has written ten pages
But it's probably frightful guff
And Angela Smythe is copying
The answers off her cuff.

Miss Quinlan is marking our homework
The clock keeps ticking away
I suppose for anyone outside
It's just another day.

There'll be mothers going on errands
Grandmothers sipping tea
Unemployed men doing crosswords
or watching 'Crown Court' on TV.

The rain has finally stopped here
The sun has started to shine
And in a back garden in Sefton Drive
A housewife hangs shirts on a line.

A class files past to play tennis
The cathedral clock has just pealed
A mower chugs backwards and forwards
Up on the hockey field.

Miss Quinlan's just read what I've written
Her face is an absolute mask
Before she collects the papers in
I've a sort of favour to ask.

I thought your questions were lovely
I've only myself to blame
But couldn't you give me some marks
For writing the date and my name.

Gareth Owen

Orders of the Day

Get up!
Get washed!
Eat your breakfast!
That's my mum,
Going on and on and on and on and on ...

Sit down!
Shut up!
Get on with your work!
That's my teacher,
Going on and on and on and on and on ...

Come here!
Give me that!
Go away!
That's my big sister,
Going on and on and on and on and on ...

Get off!
Stop it!
Carry me!
That's my little sister,
Going on and on and on and on and on ...

Boss
Boss
Boss
They do it all day.
Sometimes I think I'll run away,
But I don't know
Where to go.

The only one who doesn't do it,
Is my old gran.
She says,
'Would you like to get washed?'
Or,
'Would you like to sit on this chair?'
And she listens to what I say.

People say she spoils me,
And that she's old-fashioned.
I think it's the others that spoil;
Spoil every day.
And I wish more people were old-fashioned,
... like my gran.

John Cunliffe

S8 – SCHOOL YEAR 8 (2 of 2)

If I Were a Shape

If I were a shape
I'd be a rectangle,
I'd be a snooker table with Steve Davies potting the black,
I'd be a football pitch where Spurs would always be winning,
I'd be a chocolate bar that you could never finish,
If I were a rectangle.

If I were a circle,
I'd be a hoop rolling down a mountainside,
I'd be a wheel on a fast Ferrari,
I'd be a porthole in Captain Nemo's submarine,
If I were a circle.

If I were a cone,
I'd be a black hat on a wicked witch's head,
I'd be a warning to motorists, one of thousands,
I'd be a tooth in a T Rex's jaw,
If I were a cone.

But if I were a star...
I'd be Robbie Williams!

Brian Moses

S9 – SCHOOL YEARS 9 & 10 (1 of 2)

The Visitor

A crumbling churchyard, the sea and the moon;
The waves had gouged out grave and bone;
A man was walking, late and alone

He saw a skeleton white on the ground,
A ring on a bony hand he found.

He ran home to his wife and gave her the ring.
'Oh, where did you get it?' He said not a thing.

'It's the prettiest ring in the world,' she said,
As it glowed on her finger. They skipped off to bed.

At midnight they woke. In the dark outside,
'Give me my ring!' a chill voice cried.

'What was that, William? What did it say?'
'Don't worry, my dear. It'll soon go away.'

'I'm coming!' A skeleton opened the door.
'Give me my ring!' It was crossing the floor.

'What was that, William? What did it say?'
'Don't worry, my dear. It'll soon go away.'

'I'm touching you now! I'm climbing the bed.'
The wife pulled the sheet right over her head.

It was torn from her grasp and tossed in the air:
'I'll drag you out of your bed by the hair!'

'What was that, William? What did it say?'
'Throw the ring through the window! THROW IT AWAY!'

She threw it. The skeleton leapt from the sill,
Scooped up the ring and clattered downhill,
Fainter ... and fainter ... Then all was still.

Ian Serrailier

The Huntsman

Kagwa hunted the lion,
Through bush and forest went his spear.
One day he found the skull of a man
And said to it, 'How did you come here?'
The skull opened its mouth and said
'Talking brought me here.'

Kagwa hurried home;
Went to the king's chair and spoke:
'In the forest I found a talking skull.'
The king was silent. Then he said slowly
'Never since I was born of my mother
Have I seen or heard of a skull which spoke.'

The king called out his guards:
'Two of you now go with him
And find this talking skull;
But if his tale is a lie
And the skull speaks no word,
This Kagwa himself must die.'

They rode into the forest;
For days and nights they found nothing.
At last they saw the skull; Kagwa
Said to it 'How did you come here?'
The skull said nothing. Kagwa implored,
But the skull said nothing.

The guards said 'Kneel down.'
They killed him with sword and spear.
Then the skull opened its mouth;
'Huntsman, how did you come here?'
And the dead man answered
'Talking brought me here.'

Edward Lowbury

S9 – SCHOOL YEARS 9 & 10 (2 of 2)

Teacher

When you teach me,
your hands bless the air
where chalk dust sparkles.

And when you talk,
the six wives of Henry VIII
stand in the room like bridesmaids,
or the Nile drifts past the classroom window,
the Pyramids baking like giant cakes
on the playing fields.

You teach with your voice,
so a tiger prowls from a poem
and pads between desks, black and gold
in the shadow and sunlight,
or the golden apples of the sun drop
from a branch in my mind's eye.

I bow my head again
to this tattered, doodled book
and learn what love is.

Carol Ann Duffy

For the Fallen

(September 1914)

With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,
England mourns for her dead across the sea.
Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,
Fallen in the cause of the free.

Solemn the drums thrill: Death august and royal
Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres.
There is music in the midst of desolation
And a glory that shines upon our tears.

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;
They sit no more at familiar tables of home;
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;
They sleep beyond England's foam.

But where our desires are and our hopes profound,
Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,
To the innermost heart of their own land they are known
As the stars are known to the Night;

As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,
Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain,
As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,
To the end, to the end, they remain.

Colour of my Dreams

I'm a really rotten reader
the worst in all the class,
the sort of rotten reader
that makes you want to laugh.

I'm last in all the readin' tests,
my score's not on the page
and when I read to teacher
she gets in such a rage.

She says I cannot form my words
she says I can't build up
and that I don't know phonics
- and don't know c-a-t from k-u-p.

They say that I'm dyslexic
(that's a word they've just found out)
but when I get some plasticine
I know what that's about.

I make these scary monsters
I draw these secret lands
and get my hair all sticky
and paint on all me hands.

I make these super models,
I build these smashing towers
that reach up to the ceiling
- and take me hours and hours.

I paint these lovely pictures
in thick green drippy paint
that gets all on the carpet -
and makes the cleaners faint.

I build great magic forests
weave bushes out of string
and paint pink panderellos
and birds that really sing.

I play my world of real believe
I play it every day
and teachers stand and watch me
but don't know what to say.

They give me diagnostic tests,
they try out reading schemes,
but none of them will ever know
the colour of my dreams.

Peter Dixon

S10 – SCHOOL YEARS 11 — 13 (2 of 2)

All the World's a Stage

All the world's a stage
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.
And then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel,
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lin'd,
With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
His youthful hose well sav'd, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

William Shakespeare

S0 – Reception Year & Under

The Scorpion – Hilaire Belloc
Elephants – John Newlove
Oh to be – Mike Griffin

The Kingfisher Book of Comic Verse
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The Kingfisher Book of Comic Verse

Kingfisher, 1991
 Kingfisher, 1991
 Kingfisher, 1991

S1 – School Year 1

Chips – Stanley Cook
New Sights – Anon
The Coat – Dennis Lee

A Second Poetry Book
Read Me First
Read Me First

OUP, 1980
 Macmillan, 2003
 Macmillan, 2003

S2 – School Year 2

Bedtime – Eleanor Farjeon
New Shoes – Anon
Poem for the Last Day of the Football Season – Paul Cookson

Read Me First
Read Me First
Read Me First

Macmillan, 2003
 Macmillan, 2003
 Macmillan, 2003

S3 – School Year 3

It's Not My Fault – John Kitching
Monday – Eric Finney
If You're No Good at Cooking – Kit Wright

School's Out
School's Out
Kingfisher Book of Comic Verse

OUP, 2009
 OUP, 2009
 Kingfisher, 1991

S4 – School Year 4

Elastic Jones – John Foster
Why? – Gyles Brandreth
Enough to Make you Sick – Dick King-Smith

A Second Poetry Book
A Second Poetry Book
Jungle Jingles

OUP, 1980
 OUP, 1980
 Young Corgi, 2002

S5 – School Year 5

Favouritism – Trevor Harvey
Because of Number One – Pam Gidney
Homework – Ray Mather

Read Me First
Read Me First
School's Out

Macmillan, 2003
 Macmillan, 2003
 OUP, 2009

S6 – School Year 6

Midnight Wood – Raymond Wilson
I'd Like to be a Teabag – Peter Dixon
The Snowman – Roger McGough

A Second Poetry Book
Kingfisher Book of Comic Verse
Kingfisher Book of Comic Verse

OUP, 1980
 Kingfisher, 1991
 Kingfisher, 1991

S7 – School Year 7

The Ghoul – Jack Prelutsky
Give Up Slimming, Mum – Kit Wright
How to Ask for a Hamster – Valerie Bloom

A Second Poetry Book
Kingfisher Book of Comic Verse
The Works 3

OUP, 1980
 Kingfisher, 1991
 Macmillan Children's Books, 2004

S8 – School Year 8

Dear Mr Examiner – Gareth Owen
Orders of the Day – John Cunliffe
If I Were a Shape – Brian Moses

School's Out
A Second Poetry Book
The Works 2

OUP, 2009
 OUP, 1980
 Macmillan Children's Books, 2002

S9 – School Years 9 & 10

The Visitor – Ian Serraillier
The Huntsman – Edward Lowbury
Teacher – Carol Ann Duffy

A Second Poetry Book
Kingfisher Book of Comic Verse
The Works 3

OUP, 1980
 Kingfisher, 1991
 Macmillan Children's Books, 2004

S10 – School Years 11 – 13

Colour of my Dreams – Peter Dixon
All the World's a Stage – William Shakespeare
For the Fallen – Laurence Binyon

Kingfisher Book of Comic Verse
The Works 3
The Works 2

Kingfisher, 1991
 Macmillan Children's Books, 2004
 Macmillan Children's Books, 2002