



Elevate.

Poetry & Spoken Word - Week One

Poems are better than food

Words are tastier than a sandwich
More nutritious than a crust
And the words outlast the flan, which
Like the biscuit, turns to dust
But rhymes and rhythms stay forever
Deep inside the brain
A sarnie's nice but a poem is clever
And you can't recite a cheese roll
When you're suffering mental pain.

Ian McMillan

Why Poetry Matters
BBC 2009

Ian McMillan is an English poet, journalist, playwright and broadcaster. He is known for his strong and distinctive Yorkshire accent and his incisive and friendly interview style. He still lives in Darfield, the village of his birth.

This morning, he described his first cup of tea as "the freshly

Sea Fever



I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's
shaking, And a grey mist on the sea's face, and a grey dawn
breaking.

I must go down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea-gulls
crying.

I must go down to the seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way, where the wind's like a
whetted knife;
And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover,
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over.

John Masefield

Originally published in *Sea-Water Ballads*, 1902

The author was originally from Ledbury in Herefordshire. After losing both his parents, he boarded at King's School in Warwick until age 13, when he left to board the HMS *Conway*. His goal was to train for a life at sea and to break his addiction to reading which he had been criticised for by family members.

Loveliest of Trees, the Cherry Now



Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough
And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide.

Now, of my threescore years and ten,
Twenty will not come again,
And take from seventy springs a score,
It only leaves me fifty more.

And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room,
About the woodlands I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow.

A.E. Housman

Published in *A Shropshire Lad*, 1932

Pippa's Song



The year's at the spring,
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hill-side's dew-pearl'd;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn;
God's in His heaven--
All's right with the world!

Robert Browning

It inspired *Pippa's Song* by Ned Rorem, which sets this text to music.

The author fell in love with fellow poet Elizabeth Barrett and, against her father's wishes, they eloped to Italy and remained there until Elizabeth's death.

Warning



When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves.
And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.
I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired
And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells
And run my stick along the public railings
And make up for the sobriety of my youth.
I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
And pick the flowers in other people's gardens
And learn to spit.

You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat
And eat three pounds of sausages at a go
Or only bread and pickle for a week
And hoard pens and pencils and beer mats and things in boxes.

But now we must have clothes that keep us dry
And pay our rent and not swear in the street
And set a good example for the children.
We must have friends to dinner and read the papers.

But maybe I ought to practise a little now?
So people who know me are not too shocked and surprised
When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple.

Jenny Joseph

From *Selected Poems by Jenny Joseph* (Bloodaxe Books, 1992)
See included article from the *The Lancet*.

Piano



Softly, in the dusk, a woman is singing to me;
Taking me back down the vista of years, till I see
A child sitting under the piano, in the boom of the tingling
strings
And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who smiles as
she sings.

In spite of myself, the insidious mastery of song
Betrays me back, till the heart of me weeps to belong
To the old Sunday evenings at home, with winter outside
And hymns in the cosy parlour, the tinkling piano our guide.

So now it is vain for the singer to burst into clamour
With the great black piano *appassionato*. The glamour
Of childish days is upon me, my manhood is cast
Down in the flood of remembrance, I weep like a child for the
past.

D.H. Lawrence

This poem is in the public domain.

Calling For a Ladder



I have to go back, now that the beans
Top the stakes, the strawberries
Ready to pick; the kitchen garden's
Gone, a drive cut through the meadow
Where milkmaids grew
No chickens under the orchard trees
No goats down by the spring.

I can't get in from the cobbled yard
Where the bay tree grew, flourished like the wicked
Outside a door bricked up.
I walk through a hall into the kitchen
Put my hand on the table
To steady myself,
But though there are apples - my apples - in a bowl
The table shrugs me off.

I climb the stairs to a room of steel
And glass where the sky should be.
It catches the light, the same light
That bounces off the apples on the table
And now it is flowing through me
Breaking me up into Atoms.

Eleanor Cooke

*Dedicated to Tom, a neighbour who helps ready a ladder that
had fallen while Eleanor was on the roof.*

Provided by Tish Berkeley

Eden Rock



They are waiting for me somewhere beyond Eden Rock: My
father, twenty-five, in the same suit
Of Genuine Irish Tweed, his terrier Jack
Still two years old and trembling at his feet.

My mother, twenty-three, in a sprigged dress Drawn at the waist,
ribbon in her straw hat, Has spread the stiff white cloth over the
grass. Her hair, the colour of wheat, takes on the light.

She pours tea from a Thermos, the milk straight From an old
H.P. sauce-bottle, a screw
Of paper for a cork; slowly sets out
The same three plates, the tin cups painted blue.

The sky whitens as if lit by three suns.
My mother shades her eyes and looks my way Over the drifted
stream. My father spins
A stone along the water. Leisurely,

They beckon to me from the other bank.
I hear them call, 'See where the stream-path is! Crossing is not
as hard as you might think.'

I had not thought that it would be like this.

Charles Causley

From *Collected Poems, Picador, 2000*

The author once said, "If I didn't write poetry I think I'd explode."

Hope



Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chillest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

Emily Dickinson

The Poems of Emily Dickinson
Edited by R. W. Franklin (Harvard University Press, 1999)

Before these



You ask me how I am doing
I say fine
(I'm not fine)
I am feeling one million different things
all at once
and as I stare out of the window at nothing
(which has now become everything)
I don't understand why
I can't find the words for this
or even just one for this
how do you describe one million feelings
that hit you all at once
what were the things I used to worry about before
these new and unfamiliar worries arrived
what were
the one million things I thought about before
these one million moved in

Cleo Wade

Cleo is an American born in 1989. At 31, she has published two books centred around inspiration, affirmations, activism and female equality. She published this poem in response to the physical distancing and isolation we're experiencing. Posted on Instagram.

Jenny kiss'd me



Jenny kiss'd me when we met,
 Jumping from the chair she sat in;
Time, you thief, who love to get
 Sweets into your list, put that in!
Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,
 Say that health and wealth have miss'd me,
Say I'm growing old, but add
 Jenny kiss'd me.

Leigh Hunt

First published in 1838 by the *Monthly Chronicle*. It was originally entitled *Rondeau*. Inspired by Jane Welsh, the wife of Thomas Carlyle. It was written during a flu epidemic and refers to an unexpected visit by the recovered Hunt to the Carlyle household and being greeted by Jenny.

It was deemed worthy of inclusion in *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, Hazel Felleman's *Best-Loved Poems of the American People*, and Martin Gardner's *Best Remembered Poems*.

A smile



Smiling is infectious,
you catch it like the flu,
When someone smiled at me today,
I started smiling too.

I passed around the corner
and someone saw my grin.
When he smiled I realised
I'd passed it on to him.

I thought about that smile,
then I realised its worth.
A single smile, just like mine could travel
right around the earth.

if you feel a smile begin,
don't leave it undetected.
Let's start an epidemic quick,
and get the world infected!

Jez Alborough

The author writes:

This poem is published in Shake Before Opening, 1991, one of a collection of children's poetry. Of all the poems in that book, it is the one that has been included in the most anthologies. There's something about its positive message and universality which seems to touch a nerve.

Chocs



Into the half-pound box of Moonlight
my small hand crept.
There was an electrifying rustle.
There was a dark and glamorous scent.
Into my open, moist mouth
the first Montelimar went.

Down in the crinkly second layer,
five finger-piglets snuffled
among the Hazelnut Whirl,
the Caramel Square,
the Black Cherry and Almond Truffle.

Bliss.

I chomped. I gorged.
I stuffed my face,
till only the Coffee Cream
was left for the owner of the box —
tough luck, Anne Pope —
oh, and half an Orange Supreme.

Carol Ann Duffy

Originally from the Gorbals in Glasgow, Carol Ann Duffy is now a professor of contemporary poetry at Manchester Metropolitan University. She was named Britain's Poet Laureate in May 2009. This month, she was asked to choose her favourite poems for national poetry month and included another Ian McMillan called 'Adult Fiction', which we'll read next week.

I Wish I'd Looked After My Teeth



Oh, I wish I'd looked after me teeth,
And spotted the perils beneath,
All the toffees I chewed,
And the sweet sticky food,
Oh, I wish I'd looked after me teeth.

I wish I'd been that much more willin'
When I had more tooth there than fillin'
To pass up gobstoppers,
From respect to me choppers
And to buy something else with me shillin'.

When I think of the lollies I licked,
And the liquorice allsorts I picked,
Sherbet dabs, big and little,
All that hard peanut brittle,
My conscience gets horribly pricked.

My Mother, she told me no end,
"If you got a tooth, you got a friend"
I was young then, and careless,
My toothbrush was hairless,
I never had much time to spend.

Oh I showed them the toothpaste all right,
I flashed it about late at night,
But up-and-down brushin'
And pokin' and fussin'
Didn't seem worth the time... I could bite!

(next page)

I Wish I'd Looked After My Teeth



(continued)

If I'd known I was paving the way,
To cavities, caps and decay,
The murder of fillin's
Injections and drillin's
I'd have thrown all me sherbet away.

So I lay in the old dentist's chair,
And I gaze up his nose in despair,
And his drill it do whine,
In these molars of mine,
"Two amalgum," he'll say, "for in there."

How I laughed at my Mother's false teeth,
As they foamed in the waters beneath,
But now comes the reckonin'
It's me they are beckonin'
Oh, I wish I'd looked after me teeth.

Pam Ayres

Original text, *The Works: Selected Poems* (BBC Books, 2008)
Visit [The Poetry Archives](#) for live performance.

The Hippopotamus Song



A bold hippopotamus was standing one day
On the banks of the cool Shalimar
He gazed at the bottom as he peacefully lay
By the light of the evening star
Away on the hilltop sat combing her hair
His fair hippopotami maid
The hippopotamus was no ignoramus
And sang her this sweet serenade

Mud, mud, glorious mud
Nothing quite like it for cooling the blood
So follow me follow, down to the hollow
And there let us wallow in glorious mud

The fair hippopotama he aimed to entice
From her seat on that hilltop above
As she hadn't got a ma to give her advice
Came tiptoeing down to her love
Like thunder the forest re-echoed the sound
Of the song that they sang when they met
His inamorata adjusted her garter
And lifted her voice in duet

Mud, mud, glorious mud

Now more hippopotami began to convene
On the banks of that river so wide
I wonder now what am I to say of the scene
That ensued by the Shalimar side
They dived all at once with an ear-splitting sposh
Then rose to the surface again
A regular army of hippopotami
All singing this haunting refrain

Flanders & Swann