



edited by
MICHAEL LOCKWOOD

BRINGING POETRY ALIVE

i think that i

trees are poems

that earth writes

upon the sky

shall never see

a poem lovely as a tree

Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931)

Joyce Kilmer (1886-1918)



Bringing Poetry Alive

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Bringing Poetry Alive

A Guide To Classroom Practice

Edited by
Michael Lockwood



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For all the colleagues and students I have shared poetry with at
the University of Reading over the past 21 years

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Editor

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Contributors

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Andy Goodwyn is Professor of Education at The University of Reading. Having taught secondary English in schools, he then ran both PGCE Secondary and Masters programmes in English Education at the University before becoming Head of its Institute of Education. He has presented on English teaching around the world and written many articles and books. Recent publications include *The Expert Teacher of English* (2010), and *The Great Literacy Debate* (2011).

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Andy Kempe is Senior Lecturer in Drama Education at the University of Reading. He has extensive experience of working in drama with pupils of all ages and has been providing INSET to Drama and English teachers throughout the country and abroad for many years. He has written numerous articles and chapters covering a wide spectrum of issues in drama and his books are standard texts in a great many schools. He is the author of *The GCSE Drama Coursebook* and co-author of *Speaking, Listening and Drama, Progression in Secondary Drama* and *Learning to Teach Drama 11–18*.

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Margaret Perkins, a former primary school headteacher, is currently Lecturer in Education and Assistant Director of the University of Reading's Graduate Teacher Programme (Primary). She is currently researching, with Prue Goodwin, the use of reading aloud in primary teaching. Recent publications

include: 'Inside the Classroom' in M. Lewis and S. Ellis (eds) *Phonics: Practice, Research and Policy* (PCP, 2006), 'Making Space for Reading' in P. Goodwin (ed.) *The Literate Classroom* (Routledge, 2005), 'Literacy, Creativity and Popular Culture' in P. Goodwin (ed.) *Literacy Through Creativity* (David Fulton, 2004) and *Observing Primary Literacy* (SAGE, 2011).

Michael Rosen first started writing poetry when he was about 15, inspired by reading D.H. Lawrence, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Carl Sandburg and James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. He zig-zagged through education after that, doing Arts A-levels, going to medical school and then doing a degree in English at Oxford University. He also has an MA in Children's Literature from the University of Reading. His first book of poetry for children was *Mind Your Own Business* (Andre Deutsch, 1974) and since then he has been publishing poetry and performing it in schools, libraries, theatres and colleges. He was Children's Laureate from 2007–09. Some of his poetry performances are on his website: www.michaelrosen.co.uk

Morag Styles is Reader in Children's Literature at the University of Cambridge. She has written and lectured widely on children's poetry. She has organised many international conferences on children's literature as well as being responsible for a major exhibition at the British Library in 2009 (with Michael Rosen) on the history of poetry for children. She is the author of *From the Garden to the Street: 300 Years of Poetry for Children* (Cassell, 1998) and co-editor of *Poetry and Childhood* (Trentham, 2010). She was an External Examiner at the University of Reading from 2007–09.

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Preface

Morag Styles

In Tune with Yourself: Teachers, Pupils, Poets

Like one of the contributors to this volume, in my early career I experienced the groans of children after being told that they were going to do poetry. I soon learned to beguile the class into loving poetry by reading poems that would please them – without any warning – and getting them to read, perform and write their own, as well as collect their favourites in class anthologies. I managed quite happily with classic poetry, early Ted Hughes (*Meet My Folks*), Charles Causley and the many talented poets writing for children in the first half of the twentieth century. However, things really took off once *Mind Your Own Business* appeared in 1974, the first of Michael Rosen's very successful collections for children. His volume started a new trend; after that, there was never a problem with getting the pupils on side for poetry. One could then extend the range as pupils' ears got tuned to poetry, and soon it was possible to tackle almost any poem I wanted to share with children.

I wrote a couple of books for teachers, long out of print, to encourage others to believe in children as writers and readers of poetry. One was called *In Tune with Yourself* (Dunn et al., 1986) and that strikes me as a good title for this Preface as all the contributors to this volume will appreciate. They know that what good poetry teachers try to do is to help children find their own voices, as well as offering them access to a body of work stretching back as far as the beginnings of print and including the oral tradition. They also know that in the best and worst moments of our lives, poetry is a resource and solace, while at less pressured times, it can amuse us, make us think of things we always knew but had forgotten (Robert Frost) or bed the ear with a kind of literary hard core that can be built on (Seamus Heaney). A profound belief in the good offices of poetry permeates this welcome new volume.

The title says it all. Enthusiasts for *Bringing Poetry Alive*, all with some connection to the University of Reading's Institute of Education, show how to promote poetry joyfully in the classroom and beyond. The perspectives of poets, teachers, teacher educators and a Children's Laureate combine to offer the

reader a whole range of practical ideas for making poetry an enjoyable and satisfying experience with the young. All the contributors share a love of poetry combined with expertise in using it creatively with children. What is more, they show respect for, and belief in, the amazing things children can achieve in reading, writing, listening to and performing poetry, if it is tackled with flair and imagination. Teachers new to poetry need not be afraid – this book is very approachable and will help them find their ways into effective poetry teaching. For seasoned practitioners, there are fresh ideas and the companionship of kindred spirits.

Michael Lockwood is the guiding hand behind this harvest of poetry practice. He has been a quiet aficionado of children's poetry for many years and it is fitting that SAGE has given him the opportunity to put this volume together. In his Introduction, Michael sets out something of the history of poetry teaching in England. Some of that story is quite depressing, as poetry has always challenged teachers; it is less well covered (and, research suggests, less well taught – see recent work by Teresa Cremin and colleagues) than most other literary genres in primary and secondary classrooms – right up to 'A' level. Michael Rosen talks of his concern to break out of the cycle where schools teach for tests and cut down time and space for reading 'real books' and engaging in other forms of creative learning. (Indeed, our new government, which talks of freedom for schools, is actually strengthening its grip on the curriculum in areas like the teaching of phonics.) But as both the 'Michaels' writing in this book make clear, there are also grounds for optimism.

Rosen made a huge impact on children's poetry as Laureate and some of his initiatives are documented here. As I write, I am aware of other promising developments. At least 10 new single poet collections for children are either going into print or have recently been published. T.S. Eliot award-winner, Philip Gross' *Off Road to Everywhere* is an excellent example, part of a set of six collections of children's poetry by his publisher, Salt. Janetta Otter-Barry has four new titles on her list for Frances Lincoln – and there is more in the pipeline from Macmillan and A & C Black. A new volume on Caribbean poetry aimed at 11–16-year-olds is under construction at Peepal Tree Press at the moment. On my bookshelf, three recently published collected poems for children by brilliant poets nestle together – Adrian Mitchell (much missed), Allan Ahlberg and the Poet Laureate, Carol Ann Duffy. (The latter won the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) Poetry Award, 2010, with her *New and Collected Poems for Children*.) Sue Dymoke at Leicester University has recently been successful in getting funding for an Economic and Social Research Council seminar series on teaching poetry, while David Whitley at Cambridge University's Faculty of Education is starting a British Academy funded project on how teachers tackle poetry with students from Reception to university. Several competitions for children as poets/children as anthologists, as well as awards for new collections of poetry for young readers, are soon to be publicised. And, unusually, we have two edited volumes on children's poetry being published within the same year – this book and my own, *Poetry and Childhood* (2010, co-edited with Louise Joy and David Whitley).

Decades ahead of his time (in 1956) Ted Hughes wrote a letter to Sylvia Plath anticipating the knowledge we have gained from neuroscience about the uses of the brain:

And Eliot says that the best thing a poet can do is read aloud poetry ... This should be sound. Silent reading only employs the parts of the brain that are used in vision. Not all the brain. This means that a silent reader's literary sense becomes detached from the motor parts and the audio parts of the brain which are used in reading aloud – tongue and ear. This means that only a third of the mental components are present in their writing or in their understanding of reading. (Hughes, quoted in Reid, 2007: 50)

This book requires every contributor to conclude their chapter by giving the reader 'something to think about', 'something to read' and 'something to do'. No parts of the brain falling idle here. Put one in every staffroom!

Morag Styles
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University of Cambridge
December 2010

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Introduction

Michael Lockwood

A Tale of Two English Teachers

Mr Platt and Mr Boon taught me English in the early years of secondary school, between the ages of 11 and 14. It was the 1960s and I was a pupil at a boys' grammar school in the West Riding of Yorkshire, a region where, unknown to me, a sea-change was taking place in the teaching of English, particularly the teaching and assessment of writing.

As I look back through my English schoolbooks of this time, when I was 11 and 12, Mr Platt's comments on my written work recall his approach: *write an essay, not a story (4/10); careless (6/10); fair effort (6/10); too brief (4/10); a capital letter is not required in the same sentence*. Mr Platt's response to one piece of writing, 'A Seaside Resort in the Rain', still sticks in my mind. I have S.S. (*sentence structure*) written in the margin six times and a mark of 9 minus 3 out of 10 at the end (presumably losing half a mark per S.S.!). No other comment is given. I remember being particularly proud of this descriptive piece and of lines such as 'Rain playing a continuous tune on the pavements with an occasional plop as it entered a puddle', which received an S.S.

When I was 13, Mr Boon entered my school life and a different kind of English teaching arrived with him. Mr Boon was informal, zany even, in teaching style and speech – within the limits of a state grammar school where 'masters' still wore gowns and honours boards still hung in the hall. We were given what then seemed weird and wonderful topics to write about in prose and poetry: 'Conversation between a Bank Clerk and a Gangster', 'You Cannot Escape Death!'; we read war poets and wrote our own war poems; we wrote fictional autobiographies. My writing began to be appreciated, my marks went up and the comments in my English book changed: *good (8/10); well recounted (8/10); excellent, splendid vocabulary (9/10); you have improved so much. The first half of this is splendid (9/10)*. The written comments hardly do justice to Mr Boon's impact on me and my peers; most of the feedback that counted was oral. The way my marks continued to improve in mockery of the school's very basic assessment system gives a better impression of his approach: 10/10, 12/10, 13/10, 25/20.

With the change from Mr Platt to Mr Boon, my English teaching changed from a policing of the subject, with an expectation of conformity and a meticulous accounting of any infringements, to encouragement of individuality and a valuing of creativity and imagination. So the creative writing movement of the 1960s came into my education, though looking back it was in a fairly diluted form. I've searched my English books in vain for free verse poems, but all are doggedly (not to say doggerelly) rhyming. I don't recall any lessons where fires were started in wastepaper baskets or staged arguments broke out between teachers to provide 'stimulus' for our writing, and I've failed to find any examples of my writing in Chief Education Officer Alec Clegg's landmark collection of West Riding pupils' work, *The Excitement of Writing* (1964). However, excitement *did* come into English with Mr Boon – poetry teaching *was* brought to life, and the impact of this has stayed with me ever since: hence this book.

I'd like to begin by reviewing where this development in my own education came from and then, in the remainder of this Introduction, to trace how poetry teaching has developed since this time.

Developments in Poetry Teaching

1940s, 1950s and 1960s

Richard Andrews, in his aptly titled *The Problem with Poetry* (1991), has charted the development of poetry teaching in English schools since the Second World War. He has shown how the pioneering work of Marjorie Hourd in *The Education of the Poetic Spirit* (1949) and James Britton in his writings on the 'poetic function' of language led to the creative writing or 'progressive' movement in schools which brought Mr Boon into my classroom and was exemplified by publications such as those of Alec Clegg and Michael Baldwin's *Poetry without Tears* (1959) (Andrews, 1991: 26–8). Baldwin's comment: 'The classroom is not a lecture room; still less is it a courtroom. At most it is a workshop, with the teacher the master craftsman' (1959: 99) can stand as representative for the teaching approach of this movement. Poets such as C. Day Lewis (1944) and James Reeves (1958) also contributed to these developments in books aimed at children and teachers respectively, Lewis stressing pleasure and Reeves 'personal enthusiasm', 'liveliness and variety', demonstrated in collaborative work and 'active enjoyment', as key factors in teaching poetry (Reeves, 1958: 10–11). Over half a century on, this still sounds relevant to today's debates about poetry teaching and learning, as witnessed by many of the contributors to this volume.

Andrews (1991: 68–73) also mentions the significant contributions of later poets such as Ted Hughes and the American Kenneth Koch to poetry teaching in the 1960s and early 1970s in publishing practical poetry teaching manuals which were also anthologies of poetry for the classroom and writing by children. Hughes' approach has connections with the creative writing movement. His