WORD GAMES: introduction to writing poetry

(based on the books by Sandy Brownjohn)

1. Alliteration

Alliteration is the technique of using two or more words together which begin with the same letter. A poet would normally only use two or three words together in this way as it can be overdone. To practise it, though, in these exercises you can go really over the top and use it a lot. NB there is absolutely no need to try to make things rhyme!

- i) Try writing ten lines, each starting with a consecutive number 1-10 and consisting of : number/ adjective/noun/verb/adjective/noun
- e.g. One/ waggly/ walrus/ won/ a wet/ wager Two trustful twins tumbled into a typhoon
 - ii) Try describing something alliteratively, such as an animal, a bird, a person, a dragon...
 - e.g. The troll has...

A nose like a narrow nauseous nodule, A body like a big bulky blob, A beard like a noxious noisome nest, Knees like knobbly knots, Hands like hairy hooks And arms like abominable arches.

2. Collective nouns

Collective nouns – such as 'a pride of lions', 'a gaggle of geese', a murder of crows' and so on – can make your writing more colourful, but it is a good idea to try to think up your own as well as using the well-established ones. Have a go at making your own.

Here are some which other children have made up: *a coil of pythons a gossamer of spiders*

an echo of whispers

3. **Synonyms**

A synonym is a word which has almost the same meaning as another word (e.g. big/large icy/cold).

It is a good idea to try to find alternatives to the commonest words we use as this will make your writing more interesting and distinctive.

Try to list as many words as you can under the heading 'SPEAK' (things like shout, mumble, whisper). Keep going until you really can't think of any more. Compete against someone else! Try it again with 'MOVE', and anything else which you think might work well.

4. Acrostics

An acrostic is a poem in which the first letters of each line spell a word.

e.g. Sweet
Unsour
Golden
Absolutely marvellous at
Rotting teeth

This is a very simple one – you could use several words in every line and run on the meaning as in the last two lines here. Choose any subject you like.

For something a bit more challenging, try taking a character from a book and use the acrostic to describe him or her e.g. Here is the beginning of an acrostic of the name DICK WHITTINGTON

Dreaming of what lies ahead in London
Interested but sad to depart from his home town
Coming to see what fortune there is to find
Killing his heart at the thought of leaving

You might try a name from the Lord of the Rings or the Hobbit – GANDALF, BILBO, GOLLUM

5. Alphabet games

The alphabet gives you a good framework around which to structure some ideas. Try going through each letter, providing a name and an action:

e.g. Albert attempted to aggravate anchovies Boris bullied bewildered bullfrogs

or, you could make it more challenging by choosing a theme such as 'At the party' or 'In the park' — whatever you like. Here are a few lines for 'At the picnic' (because this is trickier you don't need all the words to start with the same letter):

Adelaide admitted she had eaten all the eggs, Belinda buried the sandwiches, Colin curried the chicken, Dennis drank everyone's juice...'

with a bit of effort, you could make it quite amusing.

6. **Kennings**

A Kenning was an old Norse technique used in writing and story-telling. It is a device for describing one thing in terms of another – e.g. The sea is called *'seal's field'* or the *'whale road'*. We see this device in Anglo-Saxon and Old English (think of Beowulf), where swords are often given names such as *'skull-splitter'*. In modern times we see words like *'iron horse'* for train and *'fire water'* for whisky used by the North American Indians.

Here are some modern ones written by children. See if you can make up some good ones of your own.

Cat

Cunning- purrer Cautious- crawler Mouse- pouncer Danger- seeker Quick- lapper Careless- stroller Hissing- sneerer

Storm

Tree- destroyer
Sky- splitter
Earth -quaker
Sky army
Giant-bomb
Cracking-fire
Sky tidal wave
Mountain- crumbler

Mouth

Food gobbler Constant eater Yawn helper Noise bringer Finger sucker Lip smacker Teeth clicker Lip licker Loud shouter Sharp whistler

7. Fiery tail

There is an anonymous poem (probably four hundred years old). At first sight it is filled with odd and impossible images:

I saw a Peacock with a fiery tail,
I saw a Blazing Comet, drop down hail,
I saw a Cloud, with Ivy circled round,
I saw a sturdy Oak, creep on the ground,
I saw a Pismire* swallow up a Whale,
I saw a raging Sea brim full of Ale,
I saw a Venice Glass Sixteen foot deep,
I saw a well full of mens tears that weep,
I saw their eyes all in a flame of fire,
I saw a House as big as the Moon and higher,
I saw the Sun even in the midst of night,
I saw the man that saw this wondrous sight.
* pismire is an old word for ant!

Can you work out what it is really saying? Try to work it out before reading the next page!

I saw a peacock.
With a fiery tail I saw a Blazing Comet,
Drop down hail I saw a Cloud
With Ivy circled round I saw a sturdy Oak
Creep on the ground I saw a Pismire
and so on.

Try making one yourself - you might come up with some very interesting images! Start like this:

Write a couple of lines that makes sense, e.g. *I saw a rosebush branching out I saw a madman scream and shout* (you don't need to rhyme)

Now write it like this:

branching out

I saw a rosebush

Fill the second line into the gap:

branching out I saw a rosebush scream and shout I saw a madman

And so on until you feel it is finished. Then enter a suitable phrase at the beginning and complete the final line in any suitable way.

Here is the full version of the one started here (written by a 10 year old)

I saw a fire branching out,
I saw a rosebush scream and shout
I saw a madman soar on high,
I saw a swallow start to lie,
I saw a nervous witness sleep,
I saw a shark fall asleep,
I saw a small child learn to fly,
I saw a baby bird cut the sky,
I saw the lightning by candlelight,
I saw a man who saw this without sight.

Here's a variation (also written by a ten year old):

I heard laughter in the dead of night,

I heard a scream rustle together,

I heard the trees singing sweetly to me,

I heard a bird beginning to bud,

I heard the flowers wailing for love,

I heard the ghost's tearful stream,

I heard the gushing of an opening gate,

I heard the squeak of breaking glass,

I heard the crash of a working clock

I heard the tick of the ocean waves,

I heard this from an honest man.