

# 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

*D*reaming of what lies ahead in London  
*I*nterested but sad to depart from his home town  
*C*oming to see what fortune there is to find  
*K*illing 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!

