



WCCS Recommends

Poetry please! Verses for boys age 4 – 13



Boys age 12-13

Pike

Ted Hughes

In Year 8 boys enjoy this sinister poem about nature red in tooth and claw for its sense of menace and its visceral, yet cryptic, imagery.

Pike, three inches long, perfect
Pike in all parts, green tigering the gold.
Killers from the egg: the malevolent aged grin.
They dance on the surface among the flies.
Or move, stunned by their own grandeur,
Over a bed of emerald, silhouette
Of submarine delicacy and horror.
A hundred feet long in their world.
In ponds, under the heat-struck lily pads –
Gloom of their stillness:
Logged on last year's black leaves, watching upwards.
Or hung in an amber cavern of weeds
The jaws' hooked clamp and fangs
Not to be changed at this date;
A life subdued to its instrument;
The gills kneading quietly, and the pectorals.



Boys age 11-12

The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales

Geoffrey Chaucer

In Year 7 WCCS boys learn that religious hypocrisy is nothing new when studying the description of the Pardoner – a medieval charlatan who makes his living from fake relics – in The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales.

There was no pardoner of equal grace,
For in his trunk he had a pillow-case
Which he asserted was Our Lady's Veil.
He said he had a gobbet of the sail
Saint Peter had the time when he made bold
To walk the waves, till Jesu Christ took hold.
He had a cross of metal set with stones
And, in a glass, a rubble of pigs' bones.
And with these relics, any time he found
Some poor up-country parson to astound,
In one short day, in money down, he drew
More than the parson in a month or two,
And by his flatteries and prevarication
Made monkeys of the priest and congregation.



Boys age 10-11

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

In Year 6 boys learn more about the effects of poetic form. For example, the line break between 'We were the first that ever burst' and 'Into that silent sea' mirrors the movement of the ship into the water, as the reader's eyes flick from one side of the page to the other.

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
'Twas sad as sad could be;
And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea!

All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon.

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, every where,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where,
Nor any drop to drink.



Boys age 9-10

Caliban, 'Be not afeard', from The Tempest

William Shakespeare

In Year 5 boys read speeches from The Tempest and learn how Shakespeare's characters speak in both prose and verse, depending on their status and state of mind. Caliban, for example, who is usurped and enslaved by Prospero, speaks beautiful lines of metred verse when describing his home on the island.

Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices
That, if I then had waked after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open and show riches
Ready to drop upon me that, when I waked,
I cried to dream again.



Boys age 8-9

The Owl and the Pussy-Cat

Edward Lear

In Year 4 boys delight in this Victorian nonsense poem featuring an owl, a cat, a pig and a turkey – with its internal rhyme ('willing', 'shilling', 'mince' and 'quince') and limerick-like rhythm.

'Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for one shilling
Your ring?' Said the Piggy, 'I will.'
So they took it away, and were married next day
By the Turkey who lives on the hill.
They dined on mince, and slices of quince,
Which they ate with a runcible spoon;
And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,
They danced by the light of the moon,
The moon,
The moon,
They danced by the light of the moon.



Boys age 7-8

Jim, Who ran away from his Nurse, and was eaten by a Lion

Hilaire Belloc

Year 3 boys learn that poems don't just paint pictures but tell stories, and issue morals, too.

There was a Boy whose name was Jim;
His Friends were very good to him.
They gave him Tea, and Cakes, and Jam,
And slices of delicious Ham,
And Chocolate with pink inside
And little Tricycles to ride,
And read him Stories through and through,
And even took him to the Zoo—
But there it was the dreadful Fate
Befell him, which I now relate.

You know—or at least you ought to know,
For I have often told you so—
That Children never are allowed
To leave their Nurses in a Crowd;
Now this was Jim's especial Foible,
He ran away when he was able,
And on this inauspicious day
He slipped his hand and ran away!



Boys age 6-7

Song of the Witches, from Macbeth

William Shakespeare

Boys in Year 2 enjoy the forceful rhythm and ghoulish imagery of Shakespeare's witches – as they cast spells in trochaic metre (which is less like natural speech than iambic metre).

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.
Fillet of a fenny snake,
In the cauldron boil and bake;
Eye of newt and toe of frog,
Wool of bat and tongue of dog,
Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting,
Lizard's leg and howlet's wing,
For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.
Cool it with a baboon's blood,
Then the charm is firm and good.



Boys age 5-6

If I Were King

A.A. Milne

Boys in Year 1 enjoy the comedy of unconnected words rhyming – like 'Greece' and 'mantelpiece', 'France' and 'aunts' – in this poem by the author of Winnie-the-Pooh.

I often wish I were a King,
And then I could do anything.

If only I were King of Spain,
I'd take my hat off in the rain.

If only I were King of France,
I wouldn't brush my hair for aunts.

I think, if I were King of Greece,
I'd push things off the mantelpiece.

If I were King of Norrway,
I'd ask an elephant to stay.

If I were King of Babylon,
I'd leave my button gloves undone.

If I were King of Timbuctoo,
I'd think of lovely things to do.

If I were King of anything,
I'd tell the soldiers, 'I'm the King!'



Boys age 4-5

Hey Diddle Diddle

Trad.

*For boys in Reception sense precedes understanding:
hence the enduring appeal of nonsense nursery
rhymes, with bouncy rhythms, like this English classic.*

Hey Diddle Diddle,
The cat and the fiddle,
The cow jumped over the moon.
The little dog laughed,
To see such sport,
And the dish ran away with the spoon.

WCCS Recommends more at
www.choirschool.com