



Poems for children to recite, read aloud and perform

It is a statutory requirement in the National Curriculum that children learn to recite poems from heart.

This collection of poems has been compiled to assist teachers in finding suitable poems for this purpose. Some are classic poems, others are more contemporary – all of them are suitable for children to perform and read aloud. Learning to retell a poem from memory is challenging and with this in mind the selected poems have been chosen for their use or rhythm, rhyme and imagery.

The collection of poems has been organised into three sections: KS1, Lower KS2 and Upper KS2. This ensures there is progression in content, style and length of poems but also flexibility for teachers to choose when they use the poems selected.

This is not an exhaustive collection but a working document which is a guide to support teachers choosing poems to recite. Personal choice is really important, if you love a poem and you think it would work as a poem to learn by heart then use it. Your enthusiasm will come through your teaching and inspire children to learn the poem.

Get to know the poem

It is helpful to think of a poem as a living thing. Recent research in neuroscience suggests that the brain responds to works of art, including poems, in the same way as it responds to people. Learning a poem is like getting to know a person – it takes time.

Another helpful way of thinking about a poem is as a written text with multimodal dimensions. To bring it alive in its fullest form, pupils need to experience it through reading it, listening to it being read and speaking it aloud. Teachers have a key role to play in modelling these approaches, especially in reading poems aloud to the class.

Poems need to be read and reflected on many times to reveal themselves. Readings might be silent or aloud, individual and together, and there should be time to talk and share enjoyments. It can be interesting to listen to different readings of the poem, by pupils themselves as well as by expert readers, including poets. We have included some audio recordings on the website and the resources section of this guide will point you to particularly good sources for more. The activities accompanying the poems on the website very often suggest ways of engaging with the poem as a spoken form.

Prepare a reading aloud

Read each line several times and try emphasizing different words and phrases. Try different tones of voice in different parts of the poem. Think about pace, volume and timing. Think about voice sound patterns, rhyme and rhythm. When you have worked out how best to read it aloud, try marking up a copy of the poem to show this using highlighting and other annotations.

Record it

The website includes a recording device (if you have the right browser) and you may have access to other recording technology. When pupils record themselves, they often want to rehearse the poem and re-record it seventeen times until they are happy with it. They can also play the recording back as a means to learn it. They could also record a version leaving a pause after each line or couple of lines, to allow them to repeat it aloud while they listen.

Embody it

Movement is a powerful memory trigger as well as a good way of exploring the poem's form. Some pupils might find it helpful to sing, chant, clap, dance or drum the poem as way of experiencing its sounds and rhythms. The challenge is then to include a sense of that musicality in a recitation of the poem. If you have enough space get pupils walking as they say lines of the poem aloud – try different speeds, and stops and starts, to fit the poem's pace and rhythm.

Listening to and trying our different readings can help pupils to find their own appreciation of the poem. Poetry By Heart competitors often tell us that this kind of personal meaning-making was the critical first step in learning their poem by heart. The following methods will help you and your pupils take this initial exploration further and could be used in lesson planning.

Make a poem poster

Another way that pupils might explore their appreciation of the poem is through visual design. You could show them William Blake's **'The Tyger'** in its original print form, richly illustrated and with a print representation of his handwriting. In fact, the process of handwriting is linked to memory and the action of putting pen to paper can help to improve recall. Pupils could write out and decorate their poem with patterns and pictures, then take a mental snapshot that they can visualize when learning it by heart.

Move it

Involve pupils in making up movements and gestures to go with lines of the poem. This is a fun way to enjoy the poem together and it will make learning the poem by heart a sociable activity. The result could be the basis of a class performance in itself.

Key Stage One

The Morning rush

Into the bathroom,
Turn on the tap.
Wash away the sleepiness –
Splish! Splosh! Splash!

Into the bedroom,
Pull on your vest.
Quickly! Quickly!
Get yourself dressed.

Down to the kitchen.
No time to lose.
Gobble up your breakfast.
Put on your shoes.

Back to the bathroom.
Squeeze out the paste.
Brush, brush, brush your teeth.
No time to waste.

Look in the mirror.
Comb your hair.
Hurry, scurry, hurry, scurry
Down the stairs.

Pick your school bag
Up off the floor.
Grab your coat
And out through the door.

John Foster

The Witches' spell

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 owlet'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.

William Shakespeare
(from Macbeth)

Daddy Fell into the Pond

Everyone grumbled. The sky was grey.
We had nothing to do and nothing to say.
We were nearing the end of a dismal day.
And there seemed to be nothing beyond,

Then

Daddy fell into the pond!

And everyone's face grew merry and bright,
And Timothy danced for sheer delight.
'Give me the camera, quick, oh quick!
He's crawling out of the duckweed!' Click!

Then the gardener suddenly slapped his knee,
And doubled up, shaking silently,
And the ducks all quacked as if they were daft,
And it sounded as if the old drake laughed.
Oh there wasn't a thing that didn't respond

When

Daddy fell into the pond!

Alfred Noyes

On the Ning Nang Nong

On the Ning Nang Nong
Where the Cows go Bong!
And the Monkeys all say boo!
There's a Nong Nang Ning
Where the trees go Ping!
And the teapots Jibber Jabber Joo.
On the Nong Ning Nang
All the mice go Clang!
And you just can't catch 'em when they do!
So it's Ning Nang Nong!
Cows go Bong!
Nong Nang Ning!
Trees go Ping!
Nong Ning Nang!
The mice go Clang!
What a noisy place to belong,
Is the Ning Nang Ning Nang Nong!!

Spike Milligan

Cats

Cats sleep
Anywhere,
Any table,
Any chair,
Top of piano,
Window-ledge,
In the middle,
On the edge,
Open drawer,
Empty shoe,
Anybody's
Lap will do,
Fitted in a
Cardboard box,
In the cupboard
With your frocks –
Anywhere!
They don't care!
Cats sleep
Anywhere.

Eleanor Farjeon

Elelephony

Once there was an elepahnt.
Who tried to use the telephant.
No! No! I mean elephone
Who tried to use the telephone.

(Dear me! I am not quite certain quite
That even now I've got it right.)
Howe-er it was, he got his trunk
Entangled in the telephunk.

The more he tried to get it free,
The louder buzzed the telephee.
(I fear I'd better drop the song
Of elehop and telephong!)

Laura Richards

Song of the Train

Clickety-clack,
Wheels on the track,
This is the way
They begin the attack:
Click-ety-clack,
Click-ety-clack,
Click-ety, *clack-ety*,
Click-ety
Clack.

Click-ety-clack,
Over the track,
Faster and faster
The song of the track:
Click-ety-clack,
Click-ety-clack,
Clickety, clackety,
Clackety
Clack.

Riding in front,
Riding in back,
Everyone hears
The song of the track:
Clickety-clack,
Clickety-clack,
Clickety - *clickety*,
Clackety
Clack.

David McCord

The Small Ghostie

When it's late and it's dark
And everyone sleeps...shhh shhh shhh,
Into our kitchen
A small ghostie creeps... shhh shhh shhh.

We hear knocking and raps
And then rattles and taps,

Then he clatters and clangs
And he batters and bangs,

And he whistles and yowls
And he screeches and howls...
So we pull up our covers over our heads
And we block up our ears and WE STAY IN OUR BEDS

Barbara Ireson

Sampan

Waves lap lap
Fish fins clap clap
Brown sails flap flap
Chop-sticks tap tap
Up and down the long green river
Ohe Ohe lanterns quiver
Willow branches brush the river
Ohe Ohe lanterns quiver
Waves lap lap
Fish fins clap clap
Brown sails flap flap
Chop-sticks tap tap

Tao Lang Pee

If You Were A Carrot

If you were a carrot
and I was a sprout
I'd boil along with you
I'd sit on your plate
If you were a tadpole
and I was a frog
I'd wait till your legs grew
I'd teach you to croak
If you were a conker
and I was a string
we'd win every battle
we'd beat everything
If you were a jotter
and I was a pen
I'd write you a message
again and again
If you were a farmer
I'd be in your herd
if you were a popsong
I'd sing every word
I wish I could tell you
that I like you a lot
but you're like a secret
and I'm like a knot.

Berlie Doherty

Please Do Not Feed The Animals

Please do not feed the ostriches
sandwiches
or the polar bears
éclairs.

Do not offer the wombats
kumquats
or the rattle-snakes
fruit-cakes.

Remember that piranhas
are not allowed bananas
or partridges
sausages.

Never approach a stork
with things on a fork
or the bustard
with a plate of custard

No leopard
likes anything peppered
and meerkats
dislike Kit Kats.

Remember that grapes
upset apes
and meringues
do the same for orang-utans.

Most importantly—
do not feed the cheetah
your teacher.

Robert Hull

Lower Key Stage Two (Year 3/4)

Slowly

Slowly the tide creeps up the sand,
Slowly the shadows cross the land.
Slowly the carthorse pulls his mile,
Slowly the old man mounts the stile.

Slowly the hands move round the clock,
Slowly the dew dries on the dock.
Slow is the snail – but slowest of all
the green moss spreads on the old brick wall.

James Reeves.

Bed in Summer

In winter I get up at night
And dress by yellow candle-light.
In summer, quite the other way,
I have to go to bed by day.

I have to go to bed and see
The birds still hopping on the tree,
Or hear the grown-up people's feet
Still going past me in the street.

And does it not seem hard to you,
When all the sky is clear and blue,
And I should like so much to play,
To have to go to bed by day?

Robert Louis Stevenson

Child's Song In Spring

The silver birch is a dainty lady,
She wears a satin gown;
The elm tree makes the old churchyard shady,
She will not live in town.
The English oak is a sturdy fellow,
He gets his green coat late;
The willow is smart in a suit of yellow,
While brown the beech trees wait.
Such a gay green gown God gives the larches –
As green as He is good!
The hazels hold up their arms for arches,
When Spring rides through the wood.
The chestnut's proud and the lilac's pretty,
The poplar's gentle and tall,
But the plane tree's kind to the poor dull city –
I love him best of all!

E. Nesbit

Walking with my Iguana

I'm walking
with my iguana

I'm walking
With my iguana

When the temperature rises
to above eighty-five,
my iguana is looking
like he's coming alive.

So we make it to the beach,
my iguana and me,
then he sits on my shoulder
as we stroll by the sea.....

and I'm walking
with my iguana

I'm walking
With my iguana

Well if anyone sees us
we're a big surprise,
my iguana and me
on our daily exercise,

till somebody phones
the local police
says I've got an alligator
tied to a leash.

when I'm walking
with my iguana

I'm walking
With my iguana

It's the spines on his back
that make him look grim,
but he just loves to be tickled
under his chin.

And I know that my iguana
is ready for bed
when he puts on his pyjamas
and lays down his sleepy head.

And I'm walking
with my iguana

still walking
With my iguana

With my iguana...
with my iguana...
and my piranha
and my chihuahua
and my chinchilla,
with my gorilla,
my caterpillar...
and I'm walking...
with my iguana...
with my iguana...
with my iguana...

Brian Moses

The door

Go and open the door.
Maybe outside there's
a tree, or a wood,
a garden,
or a magic city.

Go and open the door.
Maybe a dog's rummaging.
Maybe you'll see a face,
or an eye,
or the picture
of a picture.

Go and open the door.
If there's a fog
it will clear.

Go and open the door.
Even if there's only
the darkness ticking,
even if there's only
the hollow wind,
even if
nothing
is there,
go and open the door.

At least
there'll be
a draught.

Miroslav Holub

The River

The River's a wanderer,
A nomad, a tramp,
He never chooses one place
To set up his camp.

The River's a winder,
Through valley and hill
He twists and he turns,
He just cannot be still.

The River's a hoarder
And he buries down deep
Those little treasures
That he wants to keep.

The River's a baby,
He gurgles and hums,
And sounds like he's happily
Sucking his thumbs.

The River's a singer,
As he dances along,
The countryside echoes
The notes of his song.

The River's a monster,
Hungry and vexed,
He's goggled up trees
And he'll swallow you next.

Valerie Bloom

Gran Can You Rap?

Gran was in her chair she was taking a nap
When I tapped her on the shoulder to see if she could rap.
Gran can you rap? Can you rap? Can you Gran?
And she opened one eye and she said to me, Man,
I'm the best rapping Gran this world's ever seen
I'm a tip-top, slip-slap, rap-rap queen.
And she rose from the chair in the corner of the room
And she started to rap with a bim-bam-boom,
And she rolled up her eyes and she rolled round her head
And as she rolled by this is what she said,
I'm the best rapping gran this world's ever seen
I'm a nip-nap, yip-yap, rap-rap queen.
Then she rapped past my Dad and she rapped past my mother,
She rapped past me and my little baby brother.
She rapped her arms narrow she rapped her arms wide,
She rapped through the door and she rapped outside.
She's the best rapping Gran this world's ever seen
She's a drip-drop, trip-trap, rap-rap queen.
She rapped down the garden she rapped down the street,
The neighbours all cheered and they tapped their feet.
She rapped through the traffic lights as they turned red
As she rapped round the corner this is what she said,
I'm the best rapping Gran this world's ever seen
I'm a flip-flop, hip-hop, rap-rap queen.
She rapped down the lane she rapped up the hill,
And she disappeared she was rapping still.
I could hear Gran's voice saying, Listen Man,
Listen to the rapping of the rap-rap Gran.
I'm the best rapping Gran this world's ever seen
I'm a -

tip-top, slip-slap,
nip-nap, yip-yap,
hip-hop, trip-trap,
touch yer cap,
take a nap,
happy, happy, happy, happy,
rap-rap-queen.

Jack Ousby

Double Trouble

We were rich and poor.
We were bought and sold.
We were black and white.
We were young and old.
We were life and death.
We were north and south.
We were hand in hand.
We were foot and mouth.
We were good and bad.
We were war and peace.
We were day and night.
We were man and beast.
We were hunger and greed.
We were water and land.
We were empty and full.
We were lost and found.
We had two strings to our bow.
We were in it together.
We were the spitting image.
We were the doppelganger.
We were terrible twins.
We were happy and sad.
We were alter ego.
We were sane and mad.
We were two-faced.
We were two-a-penny.
We spat, 'Double or quits.'
We sneered, 'Double the money.'
We liked to two-time.
We stayed in a twin-town.
We led a double life.
We lived in a two-up-two-down.
We were too much.
We were entwined.
We were a right pair.
We were in two minds.
We peered through bifocals.
We talked in double entendres.
We walked double-quick.
We never wandered.
We were a double act.
We were Morecambe and Wise.
We were Laurel and Hardy.
We were Jekyll and Hyde.
We were Romeo and Juliet.
We were tragedy and comedy.
We spoke tête-à-tête.
We were a carbon copy.
We dreamt in a double bed.
We were fluently bilingual.
We were in two minds.
We were never single.
We drove on dual carriageways.
We insisted on equal pay.

We were twinned; we were mated.
We loved and we hated.
We could not be separated.
We could not be separated.

Jackie Kay

Jim

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!

He hadn't gone a yard when—Bang!
With open Jaws, a lion sprang,
And hungrily began to eat
The Boy: beginning at his feet.
Now, just imagine how it feels
When first your toes and then your heels,
And then by gradual degrees,
Your shins and ankles, calves and knees,
Are slowly eaten, bit by bit.
No wonder Jim detested it!
No wonder that he shouted "Hi!"

The Honest Keeper heard his cry,
Though very fat he almost ran
To help the little gentleman.
"Ponto!" he ordered as he came
(For Ponto was the Lion's name),
"Ponto!" he cried, with angry Frown,
"Let go, Sir! Down, Sir! Put it down!"
The Lion made a sudden stop,
He let the Dainty Morsel drop,
And slunk reluctant to his Cage,
Snarling with Disappointed Rage.

But when he bent him over Jim,
The Honest Keeper's Eyes were dim.
The Lion having reached his Head,
The Miserable Boy was dead!

When Nurse informed his Parents, they
Were more Concerned than I can say:—
His Mother, as She dried her eyes,
Said, ``Well—it gives me no surprise,
He would not do as he was told!"
His Father, who was self-controlled,
Bade all the children round attend
To James's miserable end,
And always keep a-hold of Nurse
For fear of finding something worse.

Hilaire Belloc

Upper Key Stage Two (Year 5/6)

Silver

Slowly, silently, now the moon
Walks the night in her silver shoon;
This way, and that, she peers, and sees
Silver fruit upon silver trees;
One by one the casements catch
Her beams beneath the silvery thatch;
Couched in his kennel, like a log,
With paws of silver sleeps the dog;
From their shadowy cote the white breasts peep
Of doves in a silver-feathered sleep;
A harvest mouse goes scampering by,
With silver claws, and silver eye;
And moveless fish in the water gleam,
By silver reeds in a silver stream.

Walter De La Mare

Daffodils

I wander'd lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the Milky Way,
They stretch'd in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced, but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed – and gazed – but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

William Wordsworth

The Tin Can Band

Oh, the tin can band,

Oh, the tin can band!
It's the dinniest band
In the big bright land.
It's a sing-song band, it's a bing-bong band.
It's a miss-a-beat, have-a-treat, skippy-feet-band,
As we march along with our pots and pans,
And we bing and bong on our old tin cans.

We're a-singing and a-songing to the binging and the bonging.
We're escaping and a-slipping out
On every hand.

And it sounds like a battle
When our tin cans rattle,
When our tin cans rattle
And our tin cans clang.
Yes, it's sounding like the prattle and the tattle of a battle
Like a merry monster cannon going
BANG,BANG,BANG!

Though silence falls when the band's gone by,
And the street is bare to the hills and sky,
There's a nitter and a natter,
And a tiny tnny patter,
Like a whisper (only crisper)
Like a tine toy's sigh,
And a flutter like a mutter,
Like a sunny sort of stutter,
Going giggling down the gutter
Where the funny echoes die.

Margaret Mahy

Sonnet 18

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd:
And every fair from fair sometimes declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

William Shakespeare

If

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or, being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream – and not make dreams your master;
If you can think – and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with triumph and disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with wornout tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on';

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings – nor lose the common touch;
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run –
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And – which is more – you'll be a Man, my son!

Rudyard Kipling

Night Mail

This is the night mail crossing the border,
Bringing the cheque and the postal order,
Letters for the rich, letters for the poor,
The shop at the corner and the girl next door.
Pulling up Beattock, a steady climb –
The gradient's against her, but she's on time.

Past cotton grass and moorland boulder
Shovelling white steam over her shoulder,
Snorting noisily as she passes
Silent miles of wind-bent grasses.
Birds turn their heads as she approaches,
Stare from the bushes at her blank-faced coaches.
Sheepdogs cannot turn on her course.
They slumber on with paws across.
In the farm she passes no one wakes,
But the jug in the bedroom gently shakes.

Dawn freshens, the climb is done
Sown towards Glasgow she descends
Towards the steam tugs yelping down the glade of cranes,
Towards the fields of apparatus, the furnaces
Set on the dark plain like gigantic chessmen.
All Scotland waits for her:
In the dark glens, beside the pale lochs
Men long for news.

Letters of thanks, letters from banks,
Letters of joy from girl and boy,
Reciepted bills and invitations
To inspect new stock or visit relations,
And applications for situations

And timid lovers' declarations
And gossip, gossip from all the nations,
News circumstantial, new financial.
Letters with holiday snaps to enlarge in,
Letters with faces scrawled in the margin,
Letters from uncles, cousins and aunts,
Letters to Scotland from the south of France,
Letters of condolence to Highlands and Lowlands,
Notes from overseas to Hebrides –
Written on paper of every hue,
The pink, the violet, the white and the blue,
The chatty, the catty, the boring and adoring,
The cold and official and the heart's outpouring,
Clever, stupid, short and long,
They typed and the printed and the spelt all wrong.
Thousands are still asleep
Dreaming of terrifying monsters,
Of a friendly tea beside the band at Cranston's or Crawford's:
Asleep in working Glasgow, asleep in well-set Edinburgh,
Asleep in granite Aberdeen.
They continue their dreams;
But shall wake soon and long for letters,
And none will hear the postman's knock
Without a quickening of the heart,
For who can hear and feel himself forgotten?

W.H. Auden

In Flanders Fields

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up your quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

John McCrae

How to Cut a Pomegranite

'Never,' said my father,
'Never cut a pomegranate
through the heart. It will weep blood.
Treat it delicately, with respect.
Just slit the upper skin across four quarters.
This is a magic fruit,
so when you split it open, be prepared
for the jewels of the world to tumble out,
more precious than garnets,
more lustrous than rubies,
lit as if from inside.
Each jewel contains a living seed.
Separate one crystal.
Hold it up to catch the light.
Inside is a whole universe.
No common jewel can give you this.'
Afterwards, I tried to make necklaces
of pomegranate seeds.
The juice spurted out, bright crimson,
and stained my fingers, then my mouth.
I didn't mind. The juice tasted of gardens
I had never seen, voluptuous
with myrtle, lemon, jasmine,
and alive with parrots' wings.
The pomegranate reminded me
that somewhere I had another home.

Imtiaz Dharker

The Tyger

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

William Blake

The Spider and The Fly

"Will you walk into my parlour?" said the Spider to the Fly,
"'Tis the prettiest little parlour that ever you did spy;
The way into my parlour is up a winding stair,
And I've a many curious things to shew when you are there."
"Oh no, no," said the little Fly, "to ask me is in vain,
For who goes up your winding stair can ne'er come down again."
"I'm sure you must be weary, dear, with soaring up so high;
Will you rest upon my little bed?" said the Spider to the Fly.
"There are pretty curtains drawn around; the sheets are fine and thin,
And if you like to rest awhile, I'll snugly tuck you in!"
"Oh no, no," said the little Fly, "for I've often heard it said,
They never, never wake again, who sleep upon your bed!"
Said the cunning Spider to the Fly, "Dear friend what can I do,
To prove the warm affection I've always felt for you?
I have within my pantry, good store of all that's nice;
I'm sure you're very welcome—will you please to take a slice?"
"Oh no, no," said the little Fly, "kind sir, that cannot be,
I've heard what's in your pantry, and I do not wish to see!"
"Sweet creature!" said the Spider, "you're witty and you're wise,
How handsome are your gauzy wings, how brilliant are your eyes!
I've a little looking-glass upon my parlour shelf,
If you'll step in one moment, dear, you shall behold yourself."
"I thank you, gentle sir," she said, "for what you're pleased to say,
And bidding you good morning now, I'll call another day."
The Spider turned him round about, and went into his den,
For well he knew the silly Fly would soon come back again:
So he wove a subtle web, in a little corner sly,
And set his table ready, to dine upon the Fly.
Then he came out to his door again, and merrily did sing,
"Come hither, hither, pretty Fly, with the pearl and silver wing;
Your robes are green and purple—there's a crest upon your head;
Your eyes are like the diamond bright, but mine are dull as lead!"
Alas, alas! how very soon this silly little Fly,
Hearing his wily, flattering words, came slowly flitting by;
With buzzing wings she hung aloft, then near and nearer drew,
Thinking only of her brilliant eyes, and green and purple hue—
Thinking only of her crested head—poor foolish thing! At last,
Up jumped the cunning Spider, and fiercely held her fast.
He dragged her up his winding stair, into his dismal den,
Within his little parlour—but she ne'er came out again!
And now dear little children, who may this story read,
To idle, silly flattering words, I pray you ne'er give heed:
Unto an evil counsellor, close heart and ear and eye,
And take a lesson from this tale, of the Spider and the Fly.

Mary Howitt

The Magic Box

I will put in the box

the swish of a silk sari on a summer night,
fire from the nostrils of a Chinese dragon,
the tip of a tongue touching a tooth.

I will put in the box

a snowman with a rumbling belly
a sip of the bluest water from Lake Lucerene,
a leaping spark from an electric fish.

I will put into the box

three violet wishes spoken in Gujarati,
the last joke of an ancient uncle,
and the first smile of a baby.

I will put into the box

a fifth season and a black sun,
a cowboy on a broomstick
and a witch on a white horse.

My box is fashioned from ice and gold and steel,
with stars on the lid and secrets in the corners.
Its hinges are the toe joints of dinosaurs.

I shall surf in my box
on the great high-rolling breakers of the wild Atlantic,
then wash ashore on a yellow beach
the colour of the sun.

Kit Wright

The Highwayman

PART ONE

The wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees.
The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas.
The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,
And the highwayman came riding—

Riding—riding—

The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn-door.

He'd a French cocked-hat on his forehead, a bunch of lace at his chin,
A coat of the claret velvet, and breeches of brown doe-skin.
They fitted with never a wrinkle. His boots were up to the thigh.
And he rode with a jewelled twinkle,
His pistol butts a-twinkle,
His rapier hilt a-twinkle, under the jewelled sky.

Over the cobbles he clattered and clashed in the dark inn-yard.
He tapped with his whip on the shutters, but all was locked and barred.
He whistled a tune to the window, and who should be waiting there
But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,
Bess, the landlord's daughter,
Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.

And dark in the dark old inn-yard a stable-wicket creaked
Where Tim the ostler listened. His face was white and peaked.
His eyes were hollows of madness, his hair like mouldy hay,
But he loved the landlord's daughter,
The landlord's red-lipped daughter.
Dumb as a dog he listened, and he heard the robber say—

"One kiss, my bonny sweetheart, I'm after a prize to-night,
But I shall be back with the yellow gold before the morning light;
Yet, if they press me sharply, and harry me through the day,
Then look for me by moonlight,
Watch for me by moonlight,
I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way."

He rose upright in the stirrups. He scarce could reach her hand,
But she loosened her hair in the casement. His face burnt like a brand
As the black cascade of perfume came tumbling over his breast;
And he kissed its waves in the moonlight,
(O, sweet black waves in the moonlight!)
Then he tugged at his rein in the moonlight, and galloped away to the west.

PART TWO

He did not come in the dawning. He did not come at noon;
And out of the tawny sunset, before the rise of the moon,
When the road was a gypsy's ribbon, looping the purple moor,
A red-coat troop came marching—

Marching—marching—

King George's men came marching, up to the old inn-door.

They said no word to the landlord. They drank his ale instead.

But they gagged his daughter, and bound her, to the foot of her narrow bed.
Two of them knelt at her casement, with muskets at their side!
There was death at every window;
 And hell at one dark window;
For Bess could see, through her casement, the road that *he* would ride.

They had tied her up to attention, with many a sniggering jest.
They had bound a musket beside her, with the muzzle beneath her breast!
“Now, keep good watch!” and they kissed her. She heard the doomed man say—
Look for me by moonlight;
 Watch for me by moonlight;
I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way!

She twisted her hands behind her; but all the knots held good!
She writhed her hands till her fingers were wet with sweat or blood!
They stretched and strained in the darkness, and the hours crawled by like years
Till, now, on the stroke of midnight,
 Cold, on the stroke of midnight,
The tip of one finger touched it! The trigger at least was hers!

The tip of one finger touched it. She strove no more for the rest.
Up, she stood up to attention, with the muzzle beneath her breast.
She would not risk their hearing; she would not strive again;
For the road lay bare in the moonlight;
 Blank and bare in the moonlight;
And the blood of her veins, in the moonlight, throbbed to her love's refrain.

Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot! Had they heard it? The horsehoofs ringing clear;
Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot, in the distance? Were they deaf that they did not hear?
Down the ribbon of moonlight, over the brow of the hill,
The highwayman came riding—
 Riding—riding—
The red coats looked to their priming! She stood up, straight and still.

Tlot-tlot, in the frosty silence! *Tlot-tlot,* in the echoing night!
Nearer he came and nearer. Her face was like a light.
Her eyes grew wide for a moment; she drew one last deep breath,
Then her finger moved in the moonlight,
 Her musket shattered the moonlight,
Shattered her breast in the moonlight and warned him—with her death.

He turned. He spurred to the west; he did not know who stood
Bowed, with her head o'er the musket, drenched with her own blood!
Not till the dawn he heard it, and his face grew grey to hear
How Bess, the landlord's daughter,
 The landlord's black-eyed daughter,
Had watched for her love in the moonlight, and died in the darkness there.

Back, he spurred like a madman, shrieking a curse to the sky,
With the white road smoking behind him and his rapier brandished high.
Blood red were his spurs in the golden noon; wine-red was his velvet coat;
When they shot him down on the highway,
 Down like a dog on the highway,
And he lay in his blood on the highway, with a bunch of lace at his throat.

. . .
*And still of a winter's night, they say, when the wind is in the trees,
When the moon is a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,
When the road is a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,
A highwayman comes riding—
 Riding—riding—
A highwayman comes riding, up to the old inn-door.*

*Over the cobbles he clatters and clangs in the dark inn-yard.
He taps with his whip on the shutters, but all is locked and barred.
He whistles a tune to the window, and who should be waiting there
But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,
 Bess, the landlord's daughter,
Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.*

ALFRED NOYES