

Poetry Prompts: Week 54

Autumn treasure

This sheet is to accompany Poetry Prompt 54 that features Waterstones Children's Laureate 2022–2024 Joseph Coelho. In this week's poetry prompt, Joseph Coelho encouraged us to think about the leaves falling in Autumn. Here's a poem about another Autumn treasure. I wonder if you have found any of these before?



Look at the poem:

Read the poem aloud. You might do this yourself, with a friend or someone else could read it to you:

Conquer

Five children clasp ing mittens
could not hug the entire trunk.
Whole hands could hide in the folds of its bark.
James, the tallest boy in class,
could sit on a root,
his feet would not touch the ground.

Every classroom faced the playground,
every child could see the tree.
Leaves beckoning.
Conkers swelling.

As the bells rang
we'd march to the tree,
sticks in hand,
eyes fixed on the mace-like horse chestnuts.
Green spikes hungry to prick
our minds obsessed by the jewels within.

From *Werewolf Club Rules* by Joseph Coelho
(Frances Lincoln, 2014)



Think about the poem:

Consider the words that you just heard or read. What is happening in the poem? What does the poem make you think about? How does it make you feel? What makes you feel this way?

Think about the poem with your own experiences in mind. Have you ever seen a conker? What are they like? How is the outside shell different to the seed hidden inside? Why do you think children like to find and collect conkers?



Look at the language:

- Think about how **Joseph Coelho describes the tree and its conkers**. How do the words and phrases he chooses make us think or feel about them? There are many verbs used in the poem. Can you find them? **What does the language tell us about how the children in the poem feel about them?**
- Think about **specific comparisons used in the poem**. What does mace-like mean? Have you seen a mace before? Do you know what one is? What one looks like? **Find a picture of a mace and a conker (horse chestnut) in its shell**. Why do you think Joseph Coelho makes this comparison?
- The title of the poem, '**conquer**' and its subject '**conker**' are homophones, words that sound the same, but have different meanings and, in this case, that are spelled differently. **What is the difference in spelling and in meaning?** If you're not sure, use a dictionary, either a physical one if you have one to hand, or an online one like: <https://kids.britannica.com/kids/browse/dictionary>. Why do you think Joseph Coelho chose '**Conquer**' as the title? What does it suggest to us?

Perform the poem:

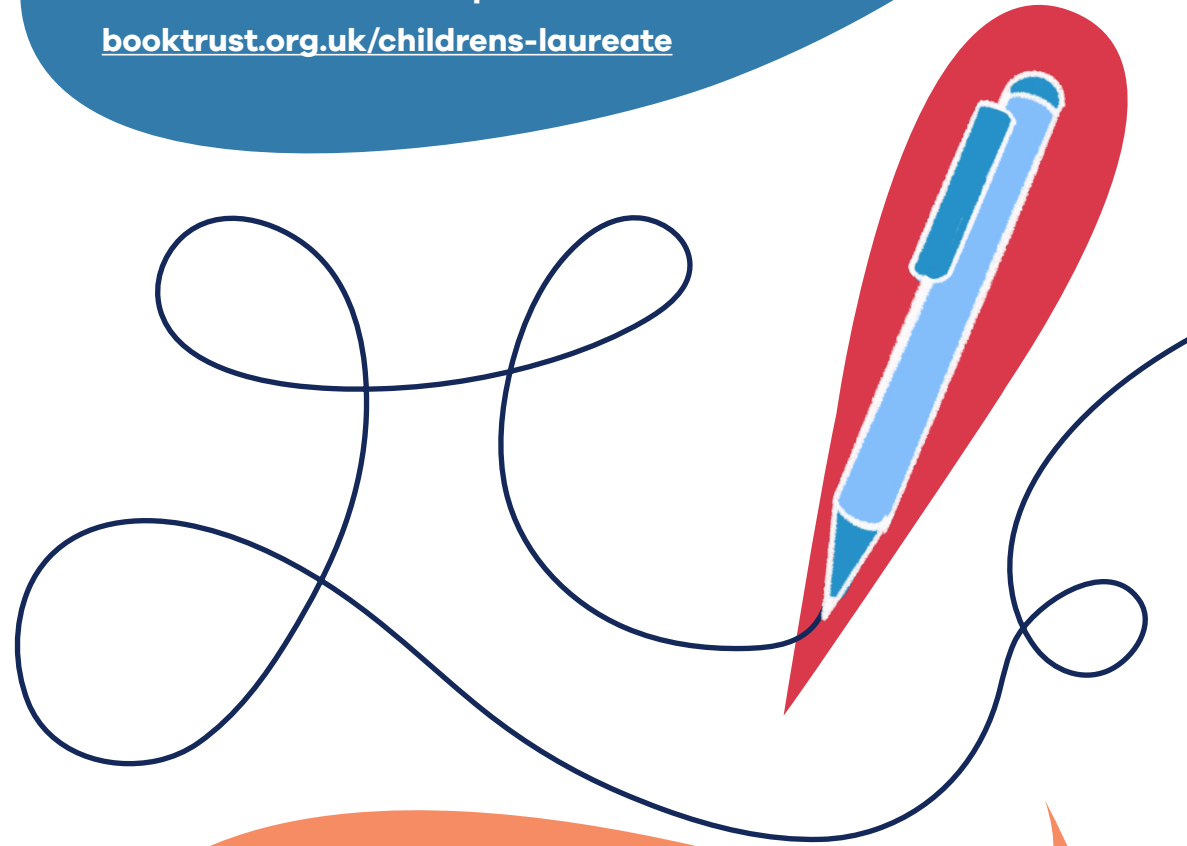
- Think about how to **bring the awe and wonder of the tree and its treasure, the conkers, to life in a performance** of the poem. Think about how Joseph Coelho builds up the anticipation of waiting for the conkers to fall during the poem. Think about how he describes the actions of the children. How might you share this in a performance of the poem? How can you use your voice in different ways to bring these out? Will some parts be louder or quieter, faster or slower, higher or lower?
- Rehearse your performance a few times until you are happy with it, **then perform it to someone else**. What sense of this moment did they get from your performance? What did they think you did that was most effective? What might they suggest if you were to perform it again?



Write your own!

- Now, take some time to **think about your favourite things about Autumn**. Is there something special that only happens at this time of year, like the conkers falling in Joseph's original poem? Is there something you always do at this time of year, like drink hot chocolate after school or watch the leaves turn to different shades and fall? Do you get excited about returning to school after the summer break? **Make a note of all the things you associate with Autumn**. Look out of the window to see what the weather is like, and what is happening in the environment, take time to remember and think about the activities or special days you've been involved with in this month.
- Now look back on your notes and **think about what might be good to explore as a poem**. It might be one specific Autumn memory or it might be a memory of being out in the environment at this time of year.
- Think about the **language you liked in the original poem**. You might choose to use verbs to describe how things behave, language to describe how things look or make you feel **to help paint a picture in the mind of your reader, or to evoke particular thoughts or feelings**. You might think about how to build up the sense of awe and wonder, or anticipation, as Joseph Coelho did in his poem.
- Think about how you will **present your poem on the page**. Where will you break the lines? Will there be more than one verse? You could also have a go at **illustrating or performing your poem to someone else**.

Find all Poetry Prompts as well as more information about Joseph Coelho at booktrust.org.uk/childrens-laureate



Find and explore more poems about plants and trees on CLPE's website.

This sequence of activities was designed in partnership with CLPE. CLPE is a UK-based children's literacy charity working with primary schools to raise the achievement of children's reading and writing by helping schools to teach literacy creatively and effectively, putting quality children's books at the heart of all learning. Find out more about their work, and access further resources and training at: clpe.org.uk.