

Poetry Prompts: Week 29

Renga

This sheet is to accompany Poetry Prompt 29 that features Waterstones Children's Laureate 2022–2024 Joseph Coelho. This week's Poetry Prompt focussed on renga. The themes for renga are usually words and images associated with seasons, nature and love. Here's another poem by Joseph Coelho that describes a seasonal moment in nature, which could inspire a verse for a renga of your own.

Read the poem:

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

April

When there was electricity in the sunset
I'd lay in the sky-hug of our balcony hammock and swing.
The rain was always welcome
each drop a cold thrill
that relaxed and washed away.

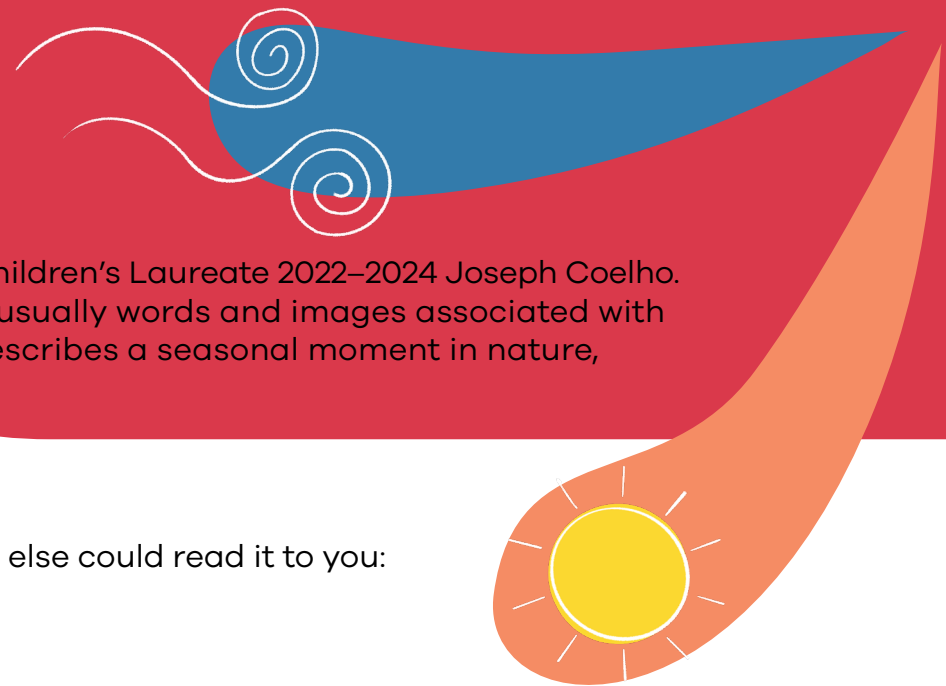
You could not get closer to the sky.
Below were cars and parents and school, above was rain.
Sky-water racing down to ease
every square inch of me.

From *A Year of Nature* by Joseph Coelho
(Quarto, 2019)



April is an undecided month –
glaring summer mornings press up to frosted evenings
but it is this madness
that allows the rain to fall in hot dry air,
that makes outdoor sitting in spring-storms normal.
That lets you discover...

... no one can see you cry
in a downpour.



Think about the poem:

Now think about the poem from the perspective of the narrator, or the 'I' in the poem. What do you know or think you know about them? What tells you, or makes you think this? How do you think they feel about the rain? What makes them feel this way?

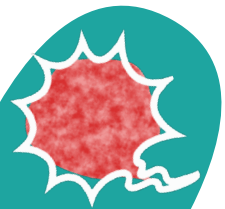
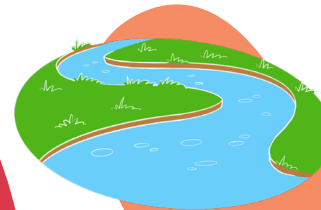
The themes for renga are usually words and images associated with seasons, nature and love. Take some time to consider the poem you just read or heard. What was happening in the poem? Does it fit the themes for renga? What did it make you think about? How did it make you feel? What made you think or feel this way?

Perform the poem:

- Now, think about how you could **use your voice** to perform the poem. Make sure you **keep your words clear** as you perform, so your audience can understand them. How can you **use your voice in different ways** to draw the audience into this moment, conveying the **emotion of the poem** as well as **describing the events?** Will some parts be louder or quieter, faster or slower, higher or lower? How will you make sure any actions you may decide to include **add to the performance**, and the listener's understanding of what is happening, rather than detract from it?
- Rehearse this a few times then **perform it for someone else** to listen to. What did they think was **most effective** about your performance? **What advice** might they give you if you were to perform it again?

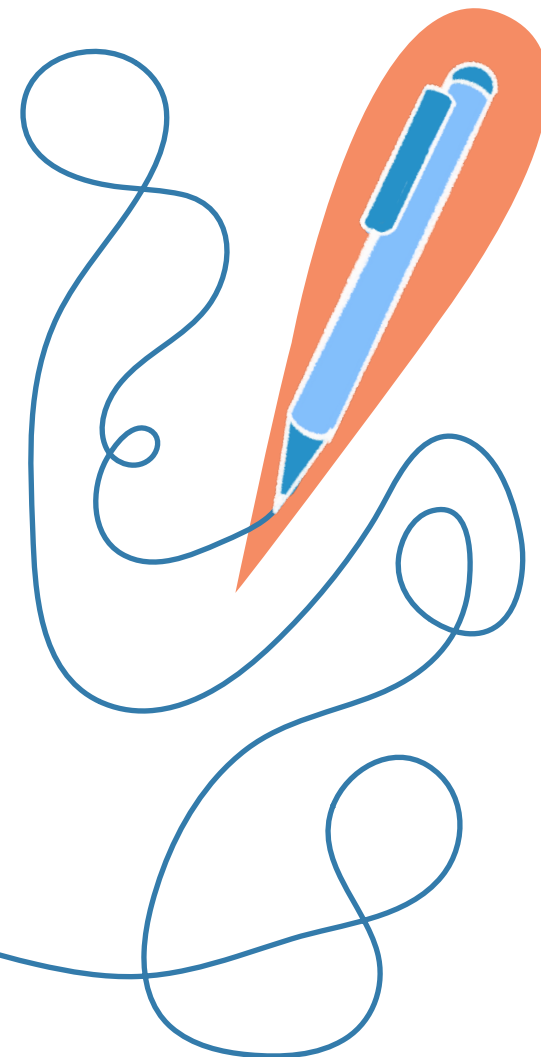
Look at the language:

- Circle or underline** words and phrases that could be drawn on to **write your own verse** about this same moment. **What images** would you give them about the April shower described? For example, ***Each drop a cold thrill*** gives a sense of sudden **enlightenment and has 5 syllables**, so this could make a good last line. As you look, consider words and phrases that might **introduce the subject or help us to imagine the rain**. You might **pick out the verbs or verb phrases** that describe the effect or movement of the rain and its drops like ***relaxed, washed away or racing***; **nouns** that describe aspects of the moment like ***sunset, sky-water***; **adjectives** that describe specific details that place pictures in your mind like ***cold thrill, glaring summer mornings, hot dry air, frosted evenings***.



Write your own!

- Now, think about how to **write the opening verse** for a renga of your own, **based on the rain or another type of weather, or a season** you are inspired by. How might you **introduce** the subject? What **detail** might you want to include? What **moment of enlightenment** do you want to share?
- A renga is a **form written by multiple collaborating poets**. To create a renga, **one poet writes the first stanza**, which is **three lines long** with a **total of seventeen syllables**. Draw on the list of words and phrases you highlighted in the original poem and **start to play with different ideas** for lines, **counting the syllables** in the words, to check they **fit the 5-7-5 pattern**.
- When you've found some lines that fit the pattern, **read them aloud** to yourself to see how they sound off the page. **Check once more that the syllable count for each line fits** the 5-7-5 pattern.
- In order for a renga to be completed, **another poet writes a new stanza** that connects to the stanza preceding it. **Pass your verse to someone else** and see if **they can write a verse** which links to and extends the ideas from your verse. You could **keep repeating this with different friends or family** members to write even more verses.
- Go out into the environment near you and **look for other inspirations** for renga. **Take a notebook and pen** with you and **write down all your thoughts and ideas** about things that capture your attention or anything in the natural world that **catches your eye**. Then look at how to pare these thoughts back to **fit the haiku pattern and philosophy**. Pass your verse to friends and family to **compose additional linked verses and build rengas together!**



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

Find and explore poems about weather 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.