

Poetry Prompts: Week 63

Creepy house

This sheet is to accompany Poetry Prompt 63 that features Waterstones Children's Laureate 2022–2024 Joseph Coelho. This week's poetry prompt was a creepy one, in which Joseph Coelho shared a poem about a creepy house written in rhyming couplets. Here's another creepy poem which also rhymes. See if you can see or hear the rhyming words as you read it or hear it read...



Look at the poem:

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

Don't Look Now

Don't look now
don't move, don't breathe
there's something behind you
unlike anything I've seen
it's looking
right at you
eyes hollow as night
it's pointing its long fingers.
Its mouth wants to bite.
It's moving its grey lips
so horribly slow

the words it is saying
are whispered and low.
Don't look now
it's incredibly near
don't move a hair's width,
It's whispering in your ear.

From *Poems Aloud* by Joseph Coelho
(Wide Eyed Editions, 2020)

Think about the poem:

Consider the poem you just heard or read. What makes the poem creepy? What creepy images does Joseph Coelho draw on? How does he build up suspense in the poem?

Re-read the poem again. Which words, phrases or ideas stay in your mind after reading? Why do you think this is? If you were going to create an illustration for this poem, what might you draw and why? Take a piece of paper and some drawing equipment and have a go at illustrating it. What words or ideas in the poem do you think influenced your illustration?



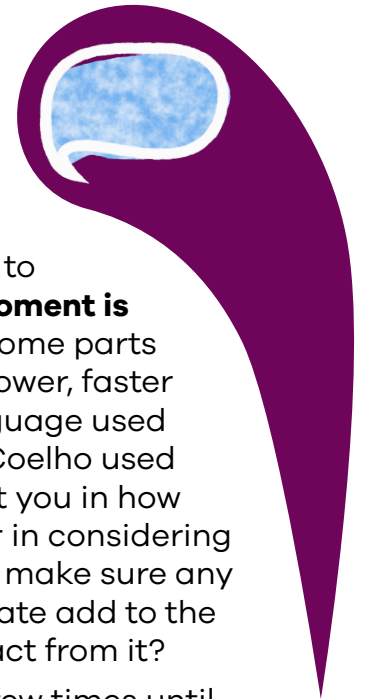


Look at the language:

- This is a short but atmospheric poem. Read the poem through again and **circle, highlight or underline the words and phrases that you think create tension and creepiness**.
- Now **look at what language is used** to build imagery. This might be through the use of:
 - adjectives as in '**long fingers**', '**grey lips**', or '**whispered**' and '**low**' to describe the words
 - adverbs such as '**horribly slow**', '**incredibly near**'
 - verbs like '**bite**', '**whispering**'
 - the auxiliary verb '**don't**' to create mood and tension in the phrases: '**don't look now, don't move, don't breathe**'
 - the simile used in the phrase '**eyes hollow as night**'
 - the use of the preposition '**behind**'
- Think about the **impact of each of these choices**. Why might Joseph Coelho have chosen to use these particular words? What impact do they have on you as a reader?

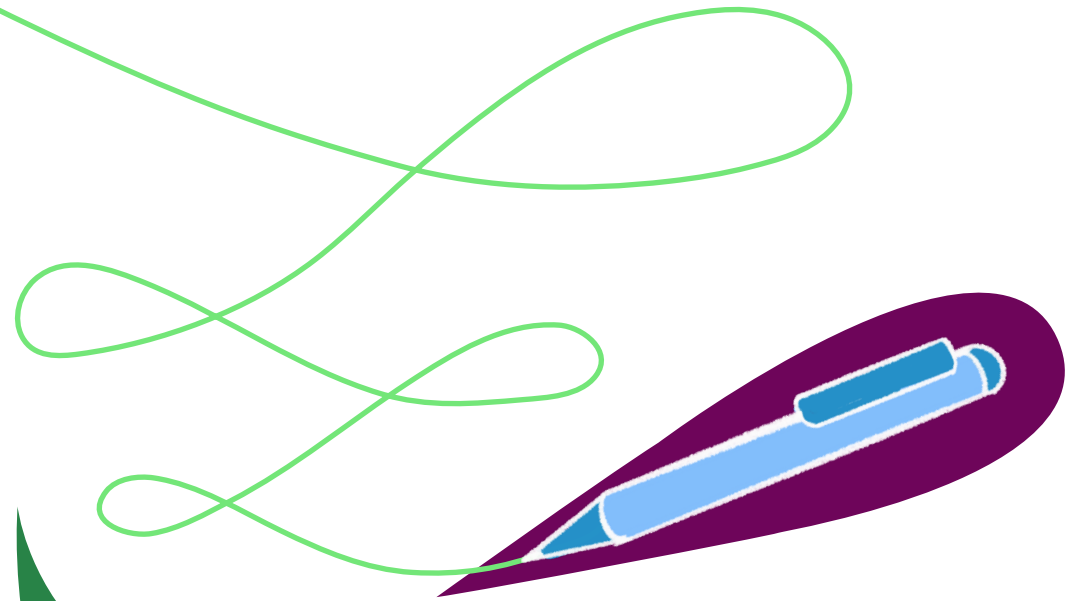
Perform the poem:

- Think about how you might **convey the mood and atmosphere of this poem in a performance**. How will you use your voice, facial expression and body language to **ensure the creepiness of the moment is felt by anyone watching?** Will some parts be louder or quieter, higher or lower, faster or slower? Consider all the language used to create images that Joseph Coelho used in the poem. These might direct you in how you choose to use your voice or in considering actions to include. How will you make sure any actions you choose to incorporate add to the performance, rather than detract from it?
- Rehearse your performance a few times until you are happy with it, **then perform it to someone else**. What sense did your audience get about this moment from the way you performed the poem? What did they think you did that was most effective?



Write your own!

- Think about how **you might write your own creepy poem**. You might choose to write about a creepy place as Joseph Coelho did in this week's video, a creepy experience, like in the poem here or a creepy figure, creature or object. If you're stuck for ideas, **try writing the word 'creepy' in the middle of a piece of paper and then filling the page with as many words, phrases and ideas** that you associate with the word. You might even add some doodles of creepy things.
- Look through all the ideas you have on your page and think about which ones might be good to develop into a creepy poem. **Start to think about the language you could choose and use to build atmosphere and tension**, remembering some of the things Joseph Coelho did in the original poem that you found effective. You might choose to use verbs, adverbs, adjectives or similes to **take your reader into the moment described**.
- When you have drafted your poem, read it again and look at how you are creating mood and atmosphere. **Does your poem have a creepy atmosphere overall?** Do you build the tension in making all the elements of the poem creepy? Remember that Joseph Coelho never actually used any words to directly describe feelings, the **other words made us feel this**.
- Think about whether you need to add or change anything before **writing it out in your best handwriting or typing it up for someone else to read**. Did they feel that your poem was creepy? What made them feel this? Did they have any ideas of how to build the atmosphere even more?



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

Find and explore more poems about feelings 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.