



# Repeating a line in a poem

This sheet is to accompany Poetry Prompt 16 that features Waterstones Children's Laureate 2022–2024 Joseph Coelho. In this week's Poetry Prompt, Joseph Coelho shared the technique of repeating a line in a poem. Here's another poem of Joseph's with a repeating line. See if you can hear and see the line, as you listen to the poem and read along.

## Read the poem:

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

## Crashed to the Ground

Birthday cake  
high on a table  
Birthday cake  
I think I'm able  
Birthday cake  
to get it down  
Birthday cake  
crashed to the ground!

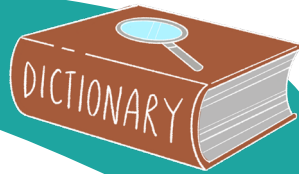
From *Smile Out Loud* by Joseph Coelho  
(Wide Eyed Editions, 2022)

## Think about the poem:

Think about the poem you just heard. What happened in the moment that was shared? How did you feel as you heard the story behind the poem unfold? What made you feel this way?



This is another poem focused on the experiences of an 'I' character. The 'I' in a poem can be anyone – a speaker who is quite unlike the poet, an historical figure, a fictional character who shares characteristics with the poet, real people from the poet's life, or sometimes the poet themselves. What does the poem make you think about the narrator or the 'I' in the poem? What might you infer about their character? How do you feel about them? What picture do you have of them in your mind? What makes you think or feel this way about them?



## Look at the language:

- **Re-read** the poem. Think about the repetition of the line **Birthday cake** throughout the poem. What does the repetition of the line **bring to the mood** of the poem? What does it **make you feel** about the story or about the character and their feelings towards the cake?
- To explore the effects of the repetition, read the poem again, but this time **remove the repeated lines** in the middle of the poem:

**Birthday cake**  
**high on a table**  
**I think I'm able**  
**to get it down**  
**Birthday cake**  
**crashed to the ground!**

How does removing the repetition **affect your thoughts or feelings** about the moment described, or your understanding of the character and their feelings towards the cake?

- Read the poem again, and this time **circle or underline** any words or phrases which help to **build the tension** of the moment described. What is it about these words that bring drama to the piece? What would happen if you changed **high** to **up**? Or **I think** to **I bet**? Or **crashed** to **fell**? How does this **change the mood** of the poem?

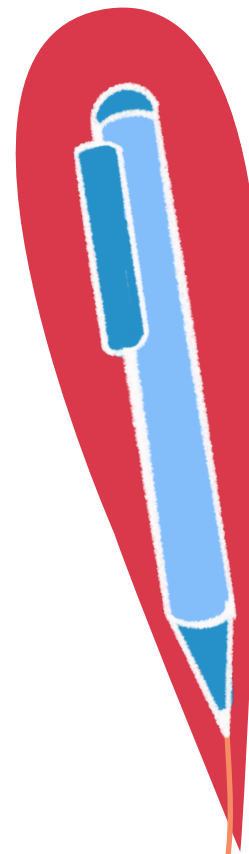
## Perform the poem:

- The poem shares a moment that builds tension to a dramatic ending, supported by the repeated line. How could you **perform this poem** in a way that brings it to life for an audience, building the tension as the poem moves on? How can you **draw your listeners in** and make them feel part of this moment with you?
- Try out different ways of **using your voice** to read 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 bring out the meaning of the words** and the feelings involved in this moment? How will **you perform the repeated line**? Will you draw on the **natural rhythm** in the words? 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**, not detract from it?
- **Rehearse your performance** a few times until you are happy with it, then perform it to someone else. What did they find **most successful** about your performance? Could they offer any suggestions to **improve it**?



## Write your own!

- This moment **describes the anticipation** of really wanting something, then not being able to have it at the end of the poem. Have **you ever experienced something like this** in your own life? Have you ever wanted something you can't have or tried to get something you really wanted and it ended badly?
- Think about something **you either really want** right now, or a time in the past that **you have really wanted** something. How can you **build a story of your journey** trying to get it? Look at the story built in the poem. The **first line** is the object **to introduce** it, the **second line** describes how it is **out of reach**. The **third line** repeats the object, reinforcing the **character's longing** to get it, the **fourth and sixth line** describe the **character's perseverance** to get it, with the name of the object repeated in between to build the tension. The **seventh line** repeats the **name of the object** and the **eighth and final line** describes the **disaster** – why the object **remains out of the character's reach**.
- Use this as a **structure to develop the narrative** about the object you long for. Will it **end in disaster** and continued longing like in the original poem, or **will you end up with the object** at the end?



Find all Poetry Prompts as well as more information about Joseph Coelho at [www.booktrust.org.uk/childrens-laureate](http://www.booktrust.org.uk/childrens-laureate)

Find and explore more poems containing repeated lines, or a refrain, on CLPE's website.

This sequence of activities was designed in collaboration with CLPE. CLPE is a UK 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](http://clpe.org.uk).