

Poetry Prompts: Week 56

Riddles

This sheet is to accompany Poetry Prompt 56 that features Waterstones Children's Laureate 2022–2024 Joseph Coelho. This week Joseph Coelho was writing riddles about natural objects that he found on another visit to the Natural History Museum. A riddle is a type of word puzzle where something is described through a series of clues requiring the reader to puzzle over what the subject is and find the answer. Here is another riddle written by Joseph Coelho, see if you can guess what object he is describing...



Look at the poem:

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

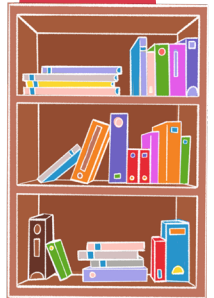
Behind You

**I'm always behind you
very rarely in front
accept when I go travelling.
I eat your lunch before you do.
I've seen all your books.
whatever you give me
I'll make sure no one else will take a look.**



Think about the poem:

Consider the poem you just heard or read. Can you guess what is being described? If you can, what words gave you the best information to guess? Did you know straight away, or did you need all the information to confirm your ideas? If you haven't guessed, what do you think you know about the thing being described? What is making it difficult for you?



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

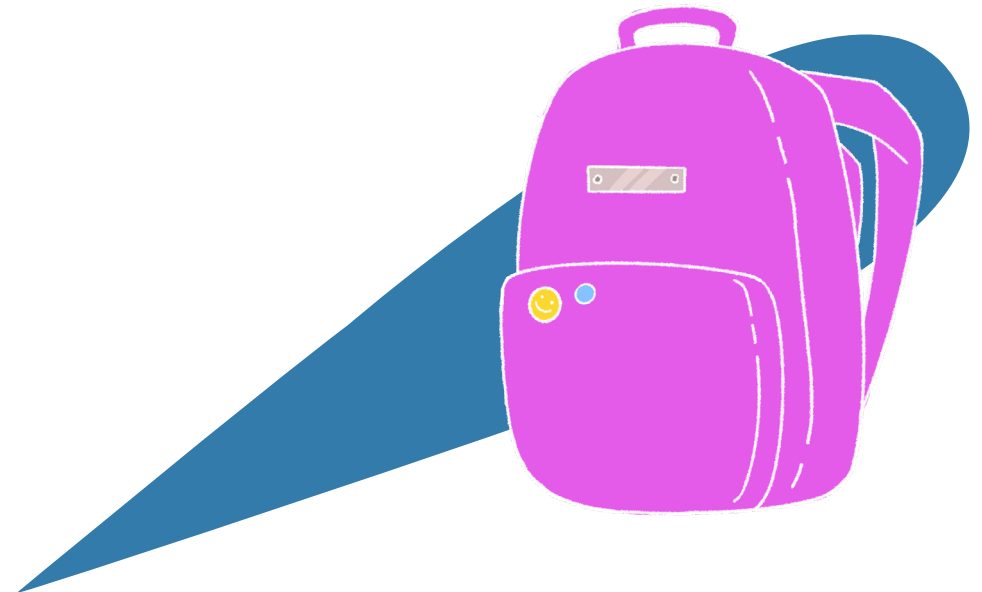
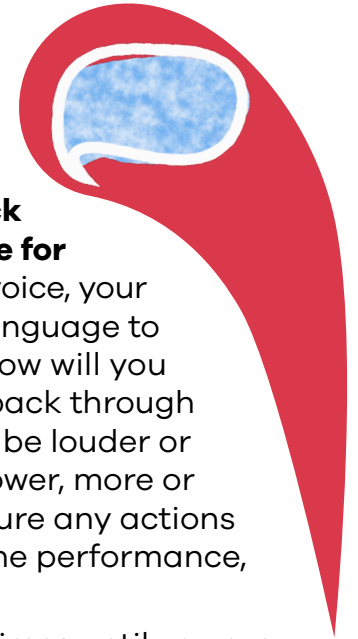


Look at the language:

- The poem contains **many words which give us clues to the object this poem is about – a backpack**. Do you own a backpack? Have you seen one before? What do people use a backpack for? How do they use them?
- Re-read the poem again and **think about how the different clues connect to what a backpack is used for and how it is used**. Why do you think Joseph Coelho says: *'I'm always behind you very rarely in front accept when I go travelling.'*? What might he mean when he says *'I eat your lunch before you do?'* and *'I've seen all your books'*? How might a backpack **'make sure no one else will take a look'** at **'whatever you give me'**?
- Read the poem one more time. **How do you feel about the backpack after reading the poem?** What makes you feel this way? Do you feel the same way throughout the poem or do your feelings about it change in different parts of the poem? Why do you think this is?

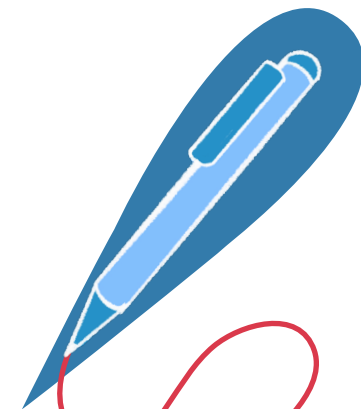
Perform the poem:

- The poem is written from the first-person perspective of the backpack. Consider how you could **bring the character of the backpack to life in a performance of the riddle for an audience**. How will you use your voice, your facial expressions and your body language to show the backpack's character? How will you show your feelings about the backpack through your performance? Will some parts be louder or quieter, faster or slower, higher or lower, more or less dramatic? 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 were they left feeling about the backpack? Was this what you wanted them to feel?



Write your own!

- Think about how you might **write your own riddle about an everyday object**. You might have something in mind already after reading Joseph's poem, you might choose to look at the everyday objects around you for inspiration, you might choose to think of a common animal or object in nature that you can see from a nearby window. It's important that it is something anyone could guess, so don't make it a very personal item that only people who know you could guess.
- If it's an object that you have in front of you, **take time to look at it carefully**. If you haven't got it near you, picture it in your mind. What are its features? How is it used? What is special about it?
- Now, think about how you can **describe this object through a series of clues** which make the person reading it puzzle over what the subject is and find the answer, like you did with Joseph's backpack poem. How will you make the clues cryptic enough so that the audience don't guess what your riddle is about too easily? What can you tell them that suggests just enough to help them?
- You can also think about how **you want to make your reader feel about the object**. In some parts of the original poem, the backpack might have seemed sinister – being behind you, eating your lunch before you do, looking at your books. In others it may have given a sense of safety and protection – keeping things safe and ensuring no-one else sees them. **How do you feel about the object you have chosen?** Could your feelings change, depending on how you look at it? How will you share your feelings in your clues?
- Put your ideas together in a draft of a riddle and read it to yourself. Do you think your clues will help a reader guess the object without being too easy or too difficult? Think about whether you need to change anything before **writing it out in your best handwriting or typing it up for someone else to read**. Could they guess the object from your clues? What made it possible – or was it too hard? If so, what could make it easier?



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

Find and explore more about riddles and other poetic forms and devices 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.