

Poetry Prompts: Week 35

Renga: part 2

This sheet is to accompany Poetry Prompt 35 that features Waterstones Children's Laureate 2022–2024 Joseph Coelho. This week, Joseph Coelho looked at a different form of poetry – the renga. The themes for renga are usually words and images associated with seasons, nature and love. Here is another poem by Joseph Coelho, about a moment in nature, which could inspire a renga.

Read the poem:

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

Richmond Park

A park,
where trees
veiled the aerials and satellite dishes,
where the sweet scent of winter berries
disguised the stench from the bins.
Where birdsong
replaced shouts,
where marshes
replaced monsters.

I ran in my red trainers
to Richmond Park.

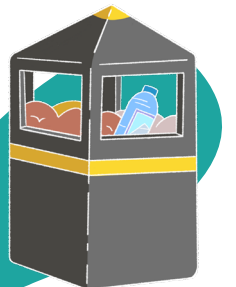
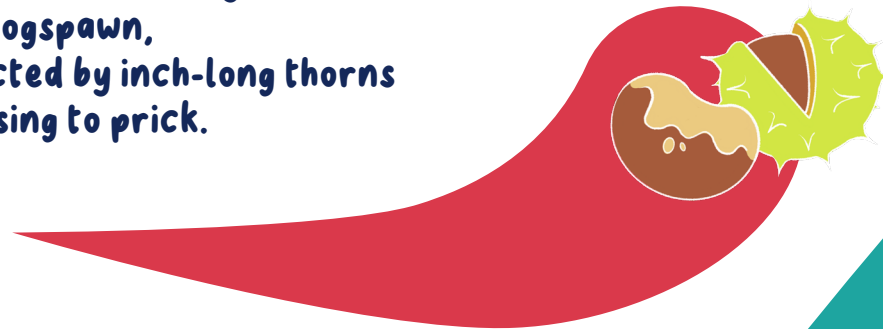
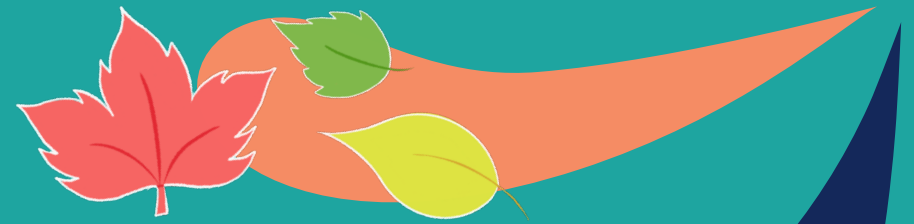
Trees of every shade of green.
Horse chestnut trees with conkers –
like fists
begging to be conquered,
wanting to be knocked.

Richmond Park.
Arcing canes of blackberries,
berries like black-eye clusters,
like frogspawn,
protected by inch-long thorns
promising to prick.

Richmond Park.
Deer with chestnut eyes,
their irises like black diamonds.

Richmond Park.
Danger and adventure wrapped
in its dark fronds,
and at its centre lay two deep ponds.

From *Overheard in a Tower Block* by Joseph Coelho
(Otter-Barry Books, 2018)

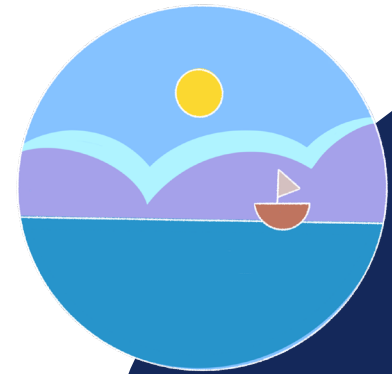


Think about the poem:

Think about the poem you just read or heard. What did it make you think about? How did it make you feel? What made you feel this way?



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, much like a haiku. The next poet adds the second stanza, a couplet with seven syllables per line. The third stanza repeats the structure of the first and the fourth repeats the second, alternating in this pattern until the poem's end. Renga usually focus on the subject of the natural world, with a use of provocative, colourful images. Think about the poem you just read or heard. Although this poem is not a renga, it is based on the same themes – words and images associated with seasons, nature, and love. What are the images that stayed in your mind after reading? Were these connected to the natural world?

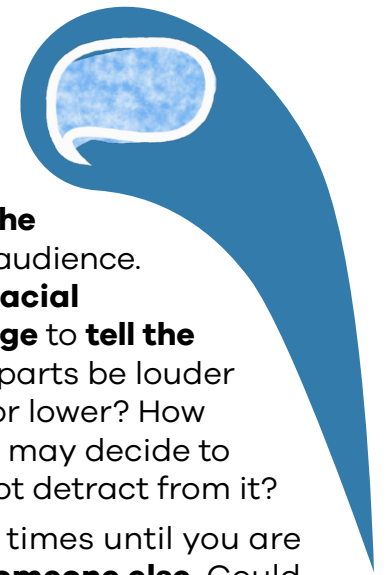


Look at the language:

- Read the poem again for yourself. As you read, **circle or underline words and phrases that draw us into the natural world** described, such as the opposition between the built-up environment and the park in lines like: '*where the sweet scent of winter berries disguised the stench from the bins*'; the simile in lines like: '*berries like black-eye clusters*'; the adjectives used throughout to give specific **detail**: '*inch-long thorns*', '*dark fronds*', '*deep ponds*'; the **personification** in lines like: '*begging to be conquered*', '*promising to prick*.'

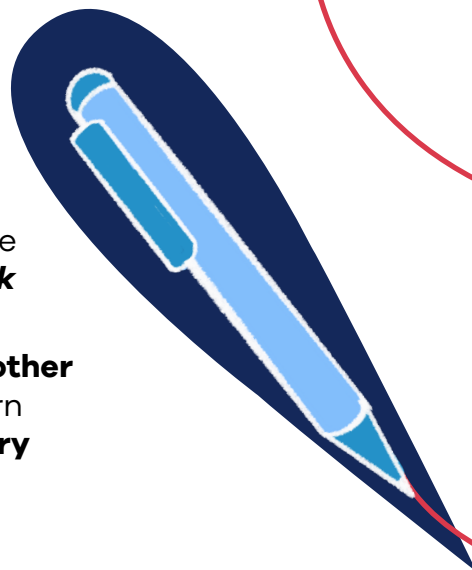
Perform the poem:

- Think about how you might **bring the experience described to life** for an audience. How will you use your **voice, your facial expressions and your body language** to **tell the story** behind the poem? 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**. Could they sense what it was like to be in this place? How did it feel to them?



Write your own!

- Take a piece of paper or notebook and a pen or pencil out **into a natural space** near you and take some time to **observe what's around you** closely, as Joe did in his poem. You might note **what's there**, what **these things look like**, what they **remind you of**, how they **make you feel** or how they **compare with where you came from**. You could make **sketches or take photographs** to remind you of important details later on.
- Use these notes to **draft the first verse of a renga**. Start to **play with different ideas** for lines, **counting out the syllables** in the words as you go, to check they fit the **5-syllable first line, 7-syllable second line and 5-syllable third line pattern** of the first verse of a renga. Some of the lines in Joe's poem do this already, like *'Deer with chestnut eyes'* (5 syllables) or *'irises like black diamonds'* (7 syllables).
- When you have your first verse, you could **work with another person to build up the rest** of the renga using the pattern described above to bring your renga to completion, **or try this out by yourself**.



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

Find and explore more about renga, haiku 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.