

KS2

Playing with words

To learn to play around with words is to learn to feel comfortable and confident with them. Poetry in particular profits from word-playfulness.

CHANGE itself is a nice word to play with.

You can get the **CHANGE** of it or add an R and it gets cross: **CHANGER**. Or remove the C and you've a **HANGER**, perhaps for a coat or, if you make another change, for a plane - that's **HANGAR**. **HANG** around in the **HANGAR** and you soon might feel **HUNGER**.

Try this with other words. Take **PLAYTIME**. Do you see **ME LAY**ing about in **PLAYTIME**? Maybe I'm going to be **LAYT!** (Oops, spelling!) Sometimes people go to an **INN** for their **dINNER** in order to feed what they call the **d-INNER** man or woman. And please don't make a _ _ _ at dinnertime.

Playing with words - it's what we call purposeful fun ...

KS3

Your changes

Change happens all the time. Sometimes it's a good thing, sometimes not. We've all experienced changes: getting older, moving house, changing school and so on.

So, what has made a change - for you? This might give you a starting point for a personal poem. For example, here are two things I remember:

I remember when my dad
Brought home the news -
We'd have to move ...

or

I remember the day
The envelope arrived
I was too sleepy
To take it in ...

The idea of change could be put into a more structured poem, using this as a pattern for several verses.

I used to
But then
And now I

It doesn't have to be about you.

E.g. my puppy used to ... / my gran used to ... / my teachers used to ...

Here's a little poem I wrote along the same lines

When Paul was small
He'd walk on the wall
But now he's tall
He's no fun at all.

KS4

Abstract and concrete

Think about how different ‘changes’ are from ‘change’. ‘Change’ is an abstract thing (unless you mean the coins in your purse or pocket!) But ‘changes’ are real. Or put an A in front - **THAT MAKES A CHANGE**. Now we’re talking about **real things** happening ...

If you try to write about ‘change’ in the abstract, your writing can become vague. It’s a similar problem if you want to write about ‘peace’ or ‘love’ or ‘war’ and so on. The abstract very rarely engages the reader; the concrete is more likely to do so. Precise examples, real experiences and careful observation are what make any writing powerful - and with poetry it is especially so.

If you look at any of the poems that are provided for study at GCSE, you will see how poets put this into practice. When Day-Lewis or Hardy or Sheers write about love, they select specific events, often situated in specific places, to convey their messages. Poets writing about war do the same.

Task

Making things concrete

Using anthologies, in books or online, find six poems about love and six about war/violence that you have not come across before. In each case list the poem, the incident and the place.

For example:

Title - poet	Incident	Place
‘Neutral Tones’ - Thomas Hardy	A parting or the ending of a relationship	By a pond
‘The Sentry’ - Wilfred Owen	A soldier blinded	In a trench / dugout

If you cannot locate a specific incident or a place, question the effectiveness of the poem. For example, Byron’s ‘When we Two Parted’ and Shelley’s ‘Love’s Philosophy’ are both rather general and, in my opinion, lack the ingredients necessary to really engage the reader. What do you think?

Some of the poems you find will involve a change taking place; this could be something an observer might be aware of, such as the ending of a relationship, but it might equally be a change in feelings about someone or something. See if you can spot these moments of change; they are often the reason for the poem to have been written.

KS5

Changing gear

You probably know that a traditional sonnet is supposed to have a 'turn' in it round about the ninth line. This might be a new thought, a contradiction or just a change of tone - perhaps showing that the writer has reached a conclusion or a summing up. These changes of direction or mood are often introduced by a 'But' or some other linguistic indicator.

A change of direction is often a quality of other poems, too. Here are some examples:

'Warning' by Jenny Joseph - six lines from the end, she changes gear with 'But now ...'

'Whitsun Weddings' by Philip Larkin - the last verse becomes a reflective conclusion.

'The Darkling Thrush' by Thomas Hardy - the third stanza contradicts the dreariness of the preceding stanzas.

Even 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' by Alfred Tennyson exhibits a change from the narrative to a rhetorical flourish with the final stanza.

Review the poems you are studying (and others beside) and note which have a change of gear and which do not. Do those with such a change have anything in common?