

KEY STAGE	AGE
KS1	5-7
KS2	7-11
KS3	11-14 ✓
KS4	14-16 ✓
KS5	16-18 ✓

AT A GLANCE
• MEMORY
• THE SENSES
• FRIENDS AND FAMILY
• ALLITERATION
• LITERARY HERITAGE POETS

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POETRYCLASS: FRESH IDEAS FOR POETRY LEARNING FROM THE POETRY SOCIETY

FOYLE **POETRY AS EULOGY**

**YOUNG
POETS**
 BY ASHLEY SMITH

OF THE YEAR AWARD

This activity involves a close reading of Phoebe Boswall’s poem ‘Baking’ and uses it, in conjunction with other poems, to help write a poetic eulogy to a lost friend or relative. Boswall, aged 17, was one of the winners of the 2012 **Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award** with ‘Baking’. You can read more about the competition at www.foyleyoungpoets.org.

Getting started

Read the poem together (full text included here), and then ask pupils to share what they know about the subject of the poem. Inferences might be made to suggest that this is an homage to the poet’s grandmother, but how do we know this? What assumptions have we made to make us think that this a ‘grandmotherly’ poem, if we do? Other than the ‘amber necklace’, is there anything to suggest that this is even a woman?

Ask the pupils to erase the initial impression that came to mind and read the poem again with different eyes, trying to eliminate their preconceptions.

Next steps

Discuss the use of the second person in the poem. How does the poet’s choice to address the subject as ‘you’ rather than ‘she’ help to personalise the imagery?

Also ask pupils to identify the ways in which the poet uses alliteration— ‘soft stretched skin’, ‘fat floury hands’, ‘blobs of buttery dough’, ‘millilitres of milk’— to draw our attention to the intimate,

fine detail of the imagery. Consider the effect of the image of hands; what does it tell us about the emotional connection between the two characters who are engaged in a shared activity?

Writing eulogies

Clarify the definition of a eulogy with the class using a dictionary or by looking online (the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* has it as ‘speech or writing in praise of a person, esp. in funeral oration’). Now explore reasons why the poet might have chosen to move from the past in the first three stanzas to the present in the final one. What effect does this create, and how does this effect fit in with the idea and intention of a eulogy? How are we left feeling as the poem ends?

TOP TIP

Compare the poem with Liz Lochhead’s ‘For My Grandmother Knitting’ (in *A Choosing*, her selected works, published by Polygon, 2011) to see the variety of meaning that can be conveyed through the observation of hands at work.

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 Ashley Smith, Head of English at St John’s College School in Cambridge, is a Poetry Society Teacher Trailblazer. Teacher Trailblazers are teachers who have been recognised for their engagement with, and commitment to, poetry education. More information at: www.poetrysociety.org.uk/content/education

Get writing

Now it's time to create your own eulogy poems. Some tips are:

- Use the second person
- Focus on a particular activity with which the person is strongly associated for you. It could be something that you did together or something that you observed them doing often
- Mention memory triggers, particularly smells and tastes, which often get overlooked when writing descriptively
- Simple but well-chosen adjectives and carefully placed alliteration will draw your reader's attention.

Further reading

The following poems provide excellent points of comparison with Boswall's poem if time allows you to make this an extended poetry topic:

- 'Digging' by Seamus Heaney— a moving homage to the poet's father described in the context of his daily work (the text is online at the excellent www.poetryfoundation.org and various other sites. The BBC Learning Zone has an audio of Heaney reading 'Digging'— www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/seamus-heaney-digging/10950.html)
- 'An April Sunday Brings the Snow' by Philip Larkin— the poet's memories of his now deceased father, triggered by the discovery of his jars of unopened jam (in the 1988 and 2003 *Collected Poems*, published by Faber)
- 'The Cockney Amorist' by John Betjeman— a lighter narrative of loss conveyed through memories of shared places (in any edition of his *Collected Poems*, published by John Murray. It is also heavily quoted in, and the inspiration for, a 2006 single 'Sheila' by Jamie T. Music video on YouTube through the EMIMusic channel: <http://youtu.be/4-L7Cadb-c0>)

BAKING

Smells of baking remind me of you.
Your red apron, my small striped one with the torn pocket.
Your soft stretched skin, fingers kneading dough
into a ball. My fat floury hands
grasped for your amber necklace,
Quick, Phoebe, the oven!

You played with flavours,
made little blobs of buttery dough on the tray
Your warm kitchen, my safe haven.

You taught me your language:
bicarbonate of soda, self-raising flour, vanilla extract,
millilitres of milk, grams of sugar:
caster, muscovado, granulated.

Now your apron hangs empty on the peg.
I wear it from time to time; mine with the torn pocket
doesn't fit anymore.

PHOEBE BOSWALL

This poem, along with the other winning poems, can be found in the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award winners' anthology. This poetry collection is created each year and sent to hundreds of schools and libraries across the UK. You can also read the anthology online at: www.foyleyoungpoets.org
