By Paul Hyland

As a poet and travel writer I use postcards as a way into both disciplines, but the purpose here is to move students to write poems about important places, special people and strong feelings.

Introduce the activity by talking about how good writing packs a lot into a small space. To paraphrase Alun Lewis’ letter home from the war – ‘I’m sorry this is such a long letter; if I’d had more time I’d have written a short one.’ Give out the worksheet and read the postcard poem with the students.

Fire the imagination

Now ask them to imagine a destination near or far from home (somewhere they’ve liked or hated OR an imaginary place). They should think about the postcard they’d send from there and get a clear image of the picture or pictures on the front. Ask them to make short descriptive notes imagining themselves in that place.

Feelings

Ask the students to imagine or remember how they feel there; feelings about where they are or about what they’ve left behind. Now they should decide on the person to whom they’d most like to send the postcard (e.g. mum, granddad, sister, boyfriend, girlfriend, best friend, worst enemy OR imaginary person). Pointing out the poet’s tip, ask the students to write their postcard.

Perform & review

Invite the students to read out their postcards. Pick out strong lines or phrases and discuss why they are good and why they might be lines in a poem. Show how, once you’ve discovered that one good line, you can work backwards and forwards from it to make a poem.

Expand into poetry

As a further activity, students could use their notes about the picture postcard to write their own poem about that place. The poem should be full of their feelings about the place but not state them. Their choice of words – the exact noun, the exact verb, and then perhaps the right adjective and adverb – should reveal them.
Dear dad,
It’s ten o’clock. I’m in bed. Outside is the sea, the bright lights, the fish & chip shops, the smell of excitement. I can’t go out because you’re in the room next door. Wish you weren’t here.
Love, Gemma

Imagine yourself in a destination near or far from home (somewhere you’ve liked or hated OR an imaginary place). Think about a postcard you’d send from there. What would the picture on the front show?

Imagine the place and your feelings about being there or what you’ve left behind. Write some descriptions on the postcard below.

NAME:
POSTCARDS HOME

Now think of the person to whom you’d most like to send a postcard from that place. Write your poetic postcard to them, including descriptions of your feelings and your place.

POET’S TIP
Choose your words carefully, so that they express exactly what you want to say to that person.