

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

AT A GLANCE
• CREATING CHARACTERS
• MONOLOGUES
• DIALOGUES
• WRITING IN ANOTHER VOICE
• DRAMA

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POETRYCLASS: FRESH IDEAS FOR POETRY LEARNING FROM THE POETRY SOCIETY

THE BUTTON JAR

BY ROZ GODDARD

I love using this exercise – it’s brilliant for beginners and more advanced writers alike. I’ve used it with children in year five upwards.

You’ll need a jar with loads of different buttons in. Pass the jar round and ask everyone to take one. Once the students have chosen a button, ask them to write a few sentences describing the type of garment on which the button was originally found. Point out the poet’s tip – get them to be very specific!

Ask them where they can visualise the garment last being – in a charity shop, in a cupboard, over the back of a chair, in a suitcase, etc.

Creating characters

Next ask them to think about who would have worn the garment last – and write down a full name and age. Now the detailed characterisation can begin:

- Who is this person?
- What do they do on a Friday night?
- What is a secret they’ve never before revealed?
- What do they dream about?
- When do they get irritable?
- What books are on their bedside cabinet?

This element of the exercise is very flexible and this is reflected by the empty spaces on the worksheet in which the students can jot down their ideas.

Get writing

Once everyone has a character profile, ask them to write a monologue from the point of view of that character. They could put their character in a context, e.g. in a cafe, on a bus, waiting in a queue for fish and chips, etc. You might take the class through a senses exercise, e.g. what can your character see as he or she looks through the window of the fish and chip shop? It often produces some lovely images.

Developing dialogues

As an alternative activity, the students could pair up and begin to talk to their partners about the kind of shared history the two characters they’ve created might have. This might result in some dialogue being produced, where a sentence might later be taken to begin a poem.



A CHARACTER FROM THE BUTTON JAR

1 Look at your button carefully. Turn it over in your hand. Now describe the garment it came from.

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2 Visualise the place where the garment was found – for example, in a charity shop, a wardrobe or a suitcase.

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3 Think of the person it belonged to. Write their name and age in the middle box. Think of some questions about the person and write the answers in the surrounding boxes.

POET'S TIP
Use detail and be specific – think about the age, colour and condition of the garment and the material from which it was made.

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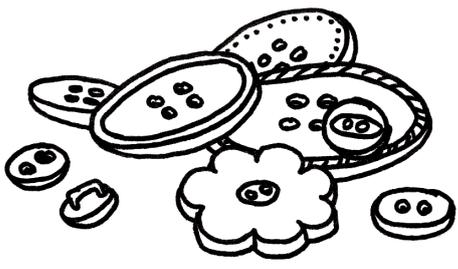
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4 Now write a poetic monologue from the point of view of the character you've built from a single button.

NAME: