

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

**AT A GLANCE**

- PERSONIFICATION
- SYLVIA PLATH
- COMPARING TEXTS
- PROSE POEMS
- LIST POEMS

**POETRYCLASS: FRESH IDEAS FOR POETRY LEARNING FROM THE POETRY SOCIETY**

**FOYLE YOUNG POETS OF THE YEAR AWARD** **WRITING A PERSONIFICATION LIST POEM**

**BY ASHLEY SMITH**

Flora de Falbe, then aged 16, was one of the 2012 winners of the **Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award** with her poem 'Five things about the lake' (read more about the competition at [www.foyleyoungpoets.org](http://www.foyleyoungpoets.org)). This activity uses 'Five things about the lake' and Sylvia Plath's 'Mirror' as stimuli for writing a list poem in which an inanimate object is given an interesting persona.

**Getting started**

Read 'Five things about the lake' together in class (full text provided overleaf), ideally displaying it on an interactive whiteboard for ease of sharing ideas.

Ask students to work individually or in pairs for five minutes to brainstorm everything that they believe they have found out about the lake. Laying their ideas out in the form of a mind map should help them to see how many different aspects are revealed by the poet about the 'persona' of the lake, e.g. character, emotions, likes, dislikes, appearance, possessions, relationship with the external world...

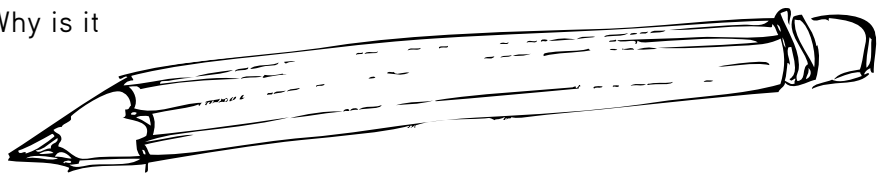
When they have done this, ask them to swap their mind maps and share any differences between them. Discuss any interesting ambiguities that may have arisen in their interpretations- e.g. what does it mean when the lake 'raises an eyebrow' or 'the rain takes the hint'? Why is it that she 'doesn't want to talk'?

**Next steps**

Share Sylvia Plath's poem 'Mirror' with the class. This poem, written in 1961, is in her *Collected Poems* (2002, published by Faber). A quick Google search will also turn up various poem texts online. The American poetry website [www.poets.org](http://www.poets.org) has context about Plath's life and death, and more examples of her writing. You could also view user-created video interpretations of the poem on [YouTube](http://YouTube).

Once you have read 'Mirror' together, ask the students to identify any similarities and differences between it and de Falbe's poem. Key ideas to consider might be:

- the effect of personification
- the idea of reflection
- the themes of beauty and vanity
- comparable images and metaphors.



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### Practice

Now ask them to write down five things about the mirror. They can dissect Plath's poem and use whatever aspects of it they choose, preserving as much of the original imagery and language as they want to or expanding upon it to tell us more about the mirror if they are feeling more confident.

For extension, you could ask the group to consider the different effects created by using the first person (as in Plath's poem) or the third person (as in de Falbe's). Does either voice involve the reader more closely? How and why?

The students can then volunteer to read their draft lists aloud to the class and share comments. These lists will form the basis of their own list poems — and remind students that as they are creating prose poems, their work doesn't need to rhyme.

### List becomes life

To bring these prose poems to life, they will need some heart. Explain to the class that the inspiration for de Falbe's poem came from time spent by a lake during her stay at the Hurst, a Shropshire centre run by the creative writing organisation Arvon (which she was visiting as a winner of the 2011 Foyle Award). In using a real place as her inspiration and creating a fictional persona for it, she has brought the lake to life in an original manner.

Ask your students to do the same by thinking of a place that they have visited that affected them strongly in some way. Urge them to give as much variety to the different aspects they describe as possible — not just appearance, but character, desires, past experiences... The aim is to make the place they describe as complex and interesting as a living human being, with genuine thoughts and feelings. This should flesh out their list into a living, breathing poem.

### TOP TIP

Imagine, as Flora de Falbe did, that the place knows that it is being written about. Ask students to explore how it feels about this when creating their list poem.

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# ***FIVE THINGS ABOUT THE LAKE:***

1. The lake is no slave to fashion, but she is proud of her frothy skirt of trees. Her dark, svelte figure.
2. She doesn't want to talk. The air rushes over her, whistling how have you been? – and she responds with a glassy stare.
3. The lake raises an eyebrow when she is speckled with rain. She doesn't do anything else but the rain takes the hint.
4. When the lake picks out her foliage she does so with impeccable taste. Even the fallen leaves have agreed on a colour scheme.
5. The lake enjoys being looked at (though she wouldn't admit it). She likes that I'm writing this.

## **FLORA DE FALBE**

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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](http://www.foyleyoungpoets.org)

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