

Poetryclass Fresh Ideas for Learning from the Poetry Society

The Battle of Agincourt: Dreaming history

By John Lindley

KS1

Topics at a glance

- Agincourt 600
- Imagery
- Descriptive language
- Emotive writing

KS2

This resource has been created to accompany the **Agincourt 600 Poetry Competition**, a collaboration between Agincourt 600 and The Poetry Society. You can find more details about the competition and how to enter your class's poems on The Poetry Society's Agincourt 600 webpage: poetrysociety.org.uk/competitions/agincourt-600

Note to teachers

The following resources and writing challenges are aimed directly at Primary Level pupils, and are intended to help you explore the Battle of Agincourt with your class. They encourage pupils to think about the history and themes of this famous battle, and equip them with the tools to create their own poems inspired by this extraordinary event.

Background

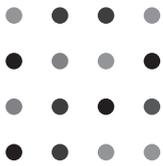
2015 is the six hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Agincourt, which was fought between the English and the French. It was part of the Hundred Years' War – which actually lasted for over one hundred years! The battle took place on 25th October 1415 in northern France. Won by the English who were led by Henry V, it is one of history's most famous battles. It's believed that between seven and ten thousand French soldiers were killed while less than two hundred died on the English side. Six hundred years on, we still talk, write books and make films about the Battle of Agincourt.



Illustration by Alex Foster.

Many of the English army were on foot and were bowmen. Their arrows would rain down on the approaching French soldiers who were struggling to ride and run through the heavy mud. Although the French had many more troops, they were bogged down and, in the narrow battlefield, got in each other's way as they charged. Their heavy armour made things even worse! Everywhere there was colour – proud generals of both sides on their grand horses and flags of red, blue and yellow whipping in the wind. Beautiful crests were emblazoned on the warriors' shields.

The Battle of Agincourt did not win the Hundred Years' War for the English but it is still remembered as one of the most famous battles in English history, and as a memorable victory against the odds for the English, who were massively outnumbered by the French.



Workshop 1

It is the night before the Battle of Agincourt. Henry V, the leader of the English army, has ordered all of his troops to be silent. He has even threatened to cut off the ears of anyone who speaks! Every soldier is left alone with his thoughts. After a while, growing tired in the cold night, one by one those weary soldiers fall asleep. When they do, their thoughts turn into dreams.

How would you feel on the eve of a big event that you will be taking part in? Nervous? Worried? Excited? Unable to sleep? Well, imagine what it must be like when that big event tomorrow will be a huge battle; a huge battle that you are going to fight in. What will it be like? How will you behave? Will it go well or badly? Will your side win or lose? And what about you – will you be unharmed, wounded or even killed?



Illustration by
Alex Foster.

Your task

Imagine that you are one of those soldiers and write a poem about the battle that you dream. You could think about some of these things when writing your poem:

- Are you a foot soldier, marching toward the enemy or are you a general riding a horse?
- What kind of weapon do you have: bow and arrow, a lance, a mace, a sword?
- How do you feel – brave or afraid?
- What do the distant sounds you hear remind you of?
- How do those sounds change as you get nearer?
- Is the French army what you expected? Are there more or less of them?
- Who won? What will this mean to the victors and the losers? What will it mean to *you*?

Use some or all of these ideas, but put them in your own words. Try and think of other things to write about too, the things that happen to yourself and those around you during the battle.

Don't write this as a story. Instead write each line as an image telling us at different stages of your poem what you see, hear, feel, smell or do from the start of the battle to the end. You might write:

Everywhere there was light until the sky turned black with arrows. (If you are a French soldier.)

I heard loud drumming in the distance and then realised it was the sound of charging feet.

Try and come up with your own original ideas.

Don't feel you must put one of the five senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch – into every line. By using some through your poem, though, you will make it come alive for the reader.

After each line, start a new one. Remember: some poems rhyme and some don't. Use whichever method suits your poem best.

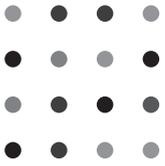


Illustration by
Alex Foster.

Workshop 2

Have you ever noticed that when we think about what might happen in the future, even when it's as close as the following day, things very rarely turn out exactly as we thought they would? They are sometimes better, sometimes worse, but never quite as we imagined they'd be.

Well, imagine waking the next morning, thinking for a second that you have just fought that battle, to quickly realise that it was only a dream. The real battle is just about to start.

You now need to think about that. Think about rising and getting ready for battle. Commanders shout orders. You line up with your comrades in your ranks. You hear and then see the approaching enemy. Think of the excitement of battle, the noise and confusion.

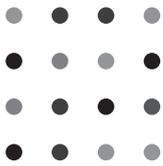
After this *real* battle, if you survived the day (and if you didn't, your voice may be that of a ghost), how did it compare to the battle that you dreamed about the night before? Which parts of it were the same? Which parts of it were different?

Your task

Now, write another poem about your experiences of the battle – the *real* battle, not your dream.

To do this, look at the first line of your earlier poem, the 'dream poem'. Write about that same incident as the first line of your new poem (let's call this your 'reality poem'). This time, though, say what *really* happened.

Do the same with the second line of your dream poem. Go through all the lines of your first poem in this method by writing lines for your new poem. Each time, write about that same moment but about what *really* happened in your battle.



The dream battle will have been different than the real one. So, for example: a line in your dream poem may have said:

*I ride bravely against the army of enemy French,
brandishing my sword, shouting "Victory!"*

Your reality poem may say:

*We attacked. My horse reared up and threw me. I
struggled to find my sword and lay, groaning.*

(Try not to use these lines. Come up with your own ideas.)

At the end of this task you will have two poems. Both will be very different in the stories they tell.

Your final task

Type out your dream poem, leaving a space between each line. After you have done this, type the lines of your reality poem in the spaces between each line. When inserting this second poem into the first it will be a good idea to choose a different font for it to help the reader see that there are two different experiences being reported.

As an example, here is a poem (published on page 5) which some Year Five pupils that I visited wrote during one of my workshop classes. Although it's on a very different subject to yours, the idea is similar.

Whilst you are typing your poem (made up of two poems!) you may want to make small changes as you go along. This is called redrafting and it is very important in writing poetry. Perhaps one of your original lines was too ordinary, not striking enough. Perhaps it had too many words – making your poem sound more like a story than a poem. Often, poems can be helped by cutting back on words as well as adding them. Make sure that you're happy with every single word you've used and when you are ...

try and think of an interesting title for your poem.

About the author

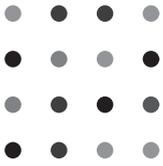
Former Cheshire Poet Laureate and Manchester Cathedral Poet of the Year, John Lindley is a freelance poet and creative writing tutor. An experienced performer, he has read at Ledbury Poetry Festival and at the Buxton and Edinburgh Fringe Festivals. He runs poetry workshops for writers' groups, festivals and in prisons, schools, universities, youth clubs and day care centres, as well as for those with learning difficulties. Widely published and a prizewinner in a number of national competitions, his poetry has also been broadcast on radio. His ninth and latest collection, *Dylan Thomas: Embers & Sparks*, was published in 2014.



Illustration by
Alex Foster.

Agincourt 600 Poetry Competition

You can now enter your class's poems in the Agincourt 600 Poetry Competition. Visit poetrysociety.org.uk/agincourt600 for the full rules, terms and conditions and prizes, and download a class set entry form. Send your poems to: Agincourt 600, The Poetry Society, 22 Betterton Street, London WC2H 9BX. You can also send them via email to educationadmin@poetrysociety.org.uk



Both Sides

Year 5 Pupil, Peacefield Primary School

I am a bully

I am the bullied

I shout, "the bully is coming"

I shout, "the bully is coming"

I am everything

I am nothing

I roar like a gorilla

I cower like a dog

I am as threatening as a volcano

I am as timid as a leaf in autumn

I kick as if kick-starting a dirt bike

I cry like a person in mourning

I smack like a plastic ruler on a desk

I scream like the wind of a blizzard

I shout his name at night

I hear him in my head and in my dreams

It's supposed to be fun but I don't like it

He thinks it's all in fun

I am as happy as the homeless

I am as sad as raindrops

I feel angry and stressed

I feel angry and stressed

Nobody loves me

Nobody loves me

I am nothing

I am everything