

**SOUTHRANK  
CENTRE**

**A POET**

**IN**

**EVERY**

**PORT**

**Teachers' pack**

## Welcome to the A Poet in Every Port teachers' pack!

As part of our 75th anniversary, the Southbank Centre and the National Poetry Library are taking the celebrations beyond our base on London's South Bank and out across the UK this summer.

Leading these celebrations is A Poet in Every Port, a national project celebrating the poetry, language and local identity of the UK's coastal communities. Inspired by the spirit of the 1951 Festival of Britain – the nationwide celebration of arts and culture that led to the creation of the Southbank Centre – this project will take to the road during the summer of 2026. We are visiting 11 coastal towns and cities in a specially designed mobile National Poetry Library.

Through free public events, workshops and poetry readings, we're working hand in hand with partners and poets across the four nations to amplify the local talent and celebrate the incredible poetry projects already thriving in each of the communities we visit.

But the journey doesn't stop at the seaside! Through this introductory teachers' pack and companion resources, we are inviting schools across the UK to join the tour, whether you are located on the coast or hundreds of miles inland. You don't need to visit the mobile library to take part – we have bottled the spirit of the project into these lesson plans so your pupils can participate from their classrooms and develop their love of poetry.



## The Word Exchange

At the heart of the project is the **Word Exchange**, which encourages people to capture the unique sound and language of where they live in the form of poetry.

This pack of resources is aimed at ages nine to 14, and will challenge students to become 'word detectives', exploring how language evolves within their own community. The 'exchange' happens on the page, where students are encouraged to mix the old with the new, comparing the dialect words passed down by grandparents with the slang used in the playground today.

Find out how to share your class' poems with us at the end of this pack, for your students' work to be retained in the National Poetry Library's collection.



A Poet in Every Port's ambassador is the much-loved poet **Roger McGough**. Hailing from Liverpool, he knows the power of local dialect better than anyone. Here is his Word Exchange poem in Scouse dialect, to inspire you and your students to write your own.

### Poetry, the big fish in the Pool of Life by Roger McGough

And we should know, we invented the word  
As well as kecks, cob ons and the Liver Bird

Antwacky, clobber, bevvv and sliced bread  
Footy of course, both Blue and Red

Scallywags, woolybacks, scran and whoppers  
Jiggers, blerts, and bizzies for coppers

I'm nesh and it's baltic, chucking it down  
So ta-ra for now, I'll see yiz round town.

*(Enjoyed writing that, the words seemed to flow  
Dialects can be fun, why not give it a go?)*

As you can see, McGough has used words from the Merseyside area to write his poem. Here's what some of these words mean – perhaps you have your own words for these things in your local area?

**Kecks** = trousers

**Cob ons** = to be annoyed

**The Liver Bird** = the symbolic bird of Liverpool

**Antwacky** = old-fashioned

**Clobber** = clothes

**Bevvv** = alcoholic drink

**Scallywags** = a rascal

**Woolybacks** = a person who lives in an area surrounding Liverpool

**Scran** = food

**Whoppers** = people who act foolishly

**Jiggers** = alleyways

**Blerts** = people who act foolishly

**Bizzies** = police

**Nesh** = feeling cold

**Baltic** = the cold

**Chucking it down** = raining



## How to use this pack

In this introductory teaching resource, we have outlined some initial starter activities you could do with your class. If you would like to extend their learning and help your students connect deeply with the heritage of their nearest shore, we have developed a companion resource covering every part of the UK. Whether your school is located in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, or in north-east, north-west, south-east, south-west, or east England, we have a guide for you that celebrates poets from across the UK.

Download the [companion resource](#), which includes:

- Tailored lesson plans: Specific sessions designed for both primary and secondary schools.
- Local inspiration: Activities featuring poems and poets from your specific region to spark local pride.
- Inclusive activities: Creative exercises with clear adaptations for SEND pupils, ensuring every student can participate in the Word Exchange.

Here's where the mobile National Poetry Library is going on tour this summer! But don't worry, you can still use this resource with your students even if you're not in one of these locations.



- 1 Great Yarmouth
- 2 Weston-super-Mare
- 3 North Uist, Scotland
- 4 Dundee, Scotland
- 5 Thames Estuary
- 6 Southend
- 7 Penzance
- 8 Caernarfon, Wales
- 9 London
- 10 Blackpool
- 11 South Shields
- 12 Bangor, Northern Ireland

## Lesson plans

Lesson plans one and two both lead pupils through the process of writing their own poem. Lesson plan one focuses on different words for everyday objects and encourages pupils to build a word bank together. Lesson plan two focuses on watching video clips of people speaking in different accents and listening to the differences and similarities, then using that process to build their word bank for poetry writing.

## Lesson plan one

 50 minutes, or 60 minutes if including the optional extension task

This lesson plan is a guide, and we invite teachers to pick and choose activities as well as adapt the suggested timings to suit their class.

### Learning objectives:

By the end of the lesson, pupils will:

1. Understand the meaning of dialect and how it changes over time.
2. Collect dialect words through discussion.
3. Draft a Word Exchange poem including five to ten dialect words.

### Definitions:

**Dialect** – A form of speech particular to a town, city or region, often featuring unique words and grammar.

**Accent** – A distinctive way of pronouncing a language, especially one associated with a particular town, city or region.

**Slang** – An informal type of vocabulary particular to a specific generation, social group, or context, often featuring newly coined or repurposed words.

## Lesson structure

### Word hunt 5 minutes

The teacher displays images of everyday objects (e.g. a roll/bap/barm/bun; trainers/daps/creps/pumps; fizzy drink/pop/soda). Students answer in pairs:

1. What do you call this item?
2. What would older relatives call it?
3. Do you know people from different regional areas who would call it something else?

The teacher collects answers and emphasises that no answers are incorrect. The teacher defines 'dialect'.

### Read and discuss the central poem 10 minutes

Introduce Roger McGough and read his commissioned poem or choose another dialect poem by a different poet that you can find in the companion resource. Ask pupils:

1. Which words feel personal/local to the poet?
2. What language and/or structural techniques is the poet using?
3. How do they add to the poem (e.g. metaphors, similes, tone, repetition, humour, contrast)?
4. Why might a poem be a good place to preserve language?

Provide some time for the pupils to discuss each question in pairs or small groups.

## Create a whole-class Word Exchange poem 🕒 5 minutes

### a. Dialect Dash:

Pupils individually write down as many local, family-specific or community-specific words as they can. This might include: nicknames for places or food, local pronunciations, slang terms, older words they don't hear anymore.

### b. Sharing and building the word bank:

Pupils move around the classroom sharing words from their Dialect Dash with classmates and adding new ones to their list. The teacher collects all the examples and records them on the board to create a dialect word bank, grouping words where helpful (e.g. food, places, people, sounds, older vs newer language).

Pupils collect and compare the words, sayings and sounds they use at home, in school and in their community, across generations and backgrounds. The focus is on celebrating language with pride. Tell pupils that all dialects and accents are valid and we explore them with respect and curiosity. **We avoid derogatory, offensive or discriminatory terms. If a word carries sensitive history, we discuss its context and choose language that is safe and respectful for school.**

**SEND support:** Provide pre-prepared examples of dialect words if needed. Use pictures, emojis or Makaton to illustrate meanings.

## Pupils write their own Word Exchange poem (ten lines) about their dialect or area 🕒 15 minutes

Students could include:

1. Five to ten local dialect words from the word bank.
2. Descriptions of people, places or activities in their region.
3. Contrast between words used by older and younger generations.
4. Repetition, metaphors and similes.
5. A sense of local pride.

Teachers can choose to model the poem-writing exercise before pupils start writing.

### Optional framework for the Word Exchange poem

Write one line per prompt:

1. A line announcing a local dialect word you use.
2. How someone else (older or from a different region) would say it.
3. A description of your street/town using a dialect word.
4. A sound you hear locally.
5. A line about a local tradition.
6. A line including a food, object or place addressed by its local name.
7. A short memory connected with your local area.
8. A line including a repeated word, sound or phrase from earlier in the poem.
9. A line about something in your local area that makes you feel proud.
10. A final line imagining how your dialect might evolve in the future.

## Lesson plan two

 50 minutes, or 60 minutes if including the optional extension task

This lesson plan is a guide, and we invite teachers to pick and choose activities as well as adapt the suggested timings to suit their class.

### Learning objectives:

By the end of the lesson, pupils will:

1. Understand the meaning of dialect and how it changes over time.
2. Collect dialect words through discussion.
3. Draft a Word Exchange poem including five to ten dialect words.

### Definitions:

**Dialect** – A form of speech particular to a town, city or region, often featuring unique words and grammar.

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**Slang** – An informal type of vocabulary particular to a specific generation, social group, or context, often featuring newly coined or repurposed words.

## Lesson structure

**Dialect detective**  5 minutes

The teacher shows short video clips of people speaking in different dialects. Pupils work in pairs or small groups to:

1. Identify words or phrases they don't usually hear in their own dialect.
2. Discuss what these words might mean.
3. Guess which region each speaker might come from.

Pupils collect and compare the words, sayings and sounds they use at home, in school and in their community, across generations and backgrounds. The focus is on celebrating language with pride. Tell pupils that all dialects and accents are valid and we explore them with respect and curiosity. We avoid derogatory, offensive or discriminatory terms. If a word carries sensitive history, we discuss its context and choose language that is safe and respectful for school.

**SEND adaptation:** Provide pre-highlighted dialect words or a transcript with pictures or emojis illustrating meaning.

### Create a whole-class Word Exchange ⌚ 5 minutes

#### a. Dialect Dash:

Pupils individually write down as many local, family-specific or community-specific words as they can. This might include: nicknames for places or food, local pronunciations, slang terms, older words they don't hear anymore.

#### b. Sharing and building the word bank:

Pupils move around the classroom sharing words from their Dialect Dash with classmates and adding new ones to their list. The teacher collects all the examples and records them on the board to create a dialect word bank, grouping words where helpful (e.g. food, places, people, sounds, older vs newer language).

**SEND support:** Provide pre-prepared examples of dialect words if needed. Use pictures, or emojis or Makaton to illustrate meanings.

### Read and discuss the central poem ⌚ 10 minutes

Introduce Roger McGough and read his commissioned poem or choose another dialect poem by a different poet. Ask pupils:

1. Which words feel personal or local to the poet?
2. What language and/or structural techniques is the poet using?
3. How do they add to the poem (e.g. metaphors, similes, tone, repetition, humour, contrast)?
4. Why might a poem be a good place to preserve language?

Provide some time for the pupils to discuss each question in pairs or small groups.

### Pupils write their own Word Exchange poem (ten lines) about their dialect or area ⌚ 15 minutes

Students could include:

1. Five to ten local dialect words from the word bank.
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The teachers can choose to model the poem-writing exercise before pupils start writing.

#### Optional framework for the Word Exchange poem

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5. A line about a local tradition.
6. A line including a food, object or place addressed by its local name.
7. A short memory connected with your local area.
8. A line including a repeated word or phrase from earlier in the poem.
9. A line about something in your local area that makes you feel proud.
10. A final line imagining how your dialect might evolve in the future.

## Sharing 🕒 10 minutes

Volunteers read their poems aloud to the class or in small groups.

## Plenary 🕒 5 minutes

Ask pupils to reflect:

1. How did using dialect- or generation-specific words make your poem feel?
2. Did you learn a new word from a classmate?

Find below two options for a collaborative extension task, to be used if time permits:

### A) Dialect map collage extension task 🕒 10 additional minutes

This task helps pupils connect language to place and collaborate creatively. Pupils work in pairs or small groups to create a visual map of their local area on A3 sheets.

On the map, they include:

1. Words from their poem (or from the class word bank) associated with streets, landmarks or local features.
2. Illustrations or symbols showing where certain dialect words are used.

Pupils present their maps to neighbouring groups, explaining how the words and locations connect.



### B) Dialect story chain extension task 🕒 10 additional minutes

This activity encourages spontaneity and demonstrates how the meaning and tone of dialect words can shift when passing through multiple voices.

Pupils create multiple collaborative stories, one line at a time, using at least one dialect word each from their poems.

Divide the class into small groups (e.g. one group per table). Each group starts their own story chain. Provide each group with a large sheet of paper or a shared document to record their story.

The first pupil in the group writes the opening line, including at least one dialect word. The next pupil adds a line, continuing the story and adding at least one new dialect word. The story keeps circulating within the group until it reaches ten to 15 lines. Lines can introduce new characters, local places and traditions, but the story should stay coherent. If appropriate, groups can swap stories with another table halfway through, continuing a different story chain.

Pupils may then present their collaborative stories to the class.

## Follow the tour and find out more

Want to see where the mobile National Poetry Library is parking up? **Visit our website** to view the tour map, check our arrival dates for the 11 coastal locations and find out about the free events happening near you.

## Show us your class poems!

Your students are the future of poetry, and we want their voices to become a permanent part of history within the National Poetry Library's collection. Please send your class' work to [info@poetrylibrary.org.uk](mailto:info@poetrylibrary.org.uk)

Not only will their poems be archived in a special national collection, but by submitting, your school gets the chance to win a truly inspiring learning experience: an exclusive, in-person workshop delivered by a poet-educator for your students. We can't wait to read what they've written.

## Credits

A Poet in Every Port is produced by the National Poetry Library and the Southbank Centre, working hand in hand with regional partners and poets across the four nations to nurture local voices.

Special thanks to our teachers' pack writer and poet, **Tommy Sissons**, for developing these resources.

## Win a live performance

Do you know any budding poets aged 16+ who are ready to take their writing to the next level?

We are looking for the best Word Exchange poems from across the UK, and offering writers the chance to win a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to perform their work live on stage at the **Southbank Centre's London Literature Festival in 2027**. Encourage your older students to visit our website to enter the national competition. It could be their first big gig!



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