



Mixed Messages in Schools

Introduction

What do you long to tell someone but for some reason never have? What about your students – what would they say? Running a Mixed Messages project in your school gives you the chance to say it with a poem this National Poetry Day. Your project can be as big or small as you have the time and inclination for – pick and choose from the four activity suggestions here.

This resource is adaptable to primary or secondary classes. Look at the original Mixed Messages blog www.mixedmessagespoetry.wordpress.com for ideas and poems. However, the blog was written for a general adult audience so, if you're working with younger pupils, consider carefully which blog elements you share with them.

Tips for ICT safety

We do NOT advise that you encourage pupils and students to text or phone their messages to an actual phone number. This avoids the problem of students and teachers sharing their personal phone numbers. Instead, if you have access to a recording device on a computer or iPad and a quiet space in the school, students could record their 'voicemails' directly.

If your school generates standard email addresses for students, then the email option could work well for your Mixed Messages. However, for student safety we do NOT recommend inviting students to email your project from their personal home email addresses. If using emails, set up a generic mixed messages email address for the messages to be sent to (e.g. mixedmessagesdougalschool@gmail.com). Keep the password private as open access to the account could compromise the anonymity of the messages.

Always act according to your school's ICT or Computing policy

Which form should the messages be in?

Bearing in mind the above points, there are several ways for students to send their messages simply and safely:

- Email the message to your dedicated mixed messages email account
- Record themselves speaking their message aloud
- Use a postcard template to physically write the message (downloadable templates available at <http://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-m-279-postcard-writing-template> and <https://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/postcard-template-blank-a4-landscape-3001951>)
- Use our text message template (at the end of this resource pack) to write a text message on paper.

It's important that pupils and students feel that the method they choose allows them to be anonymous if they wish. (If they are emailing, explain that their identity will not be shared with the rest of the class, even if their messages are read aloud. With anonymity in mind, ask students not to reveal full names of the people their messages are for – stick to first names or relationship terms such as granny, dad, my best friend etc.



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Which forms can the poems be in?

Found poetry

Mixed Messages asks students to make found poems from their own or other's message texts.

“Found poems take existing texts and refashion them, reorder them, and present them as poems. The literary equivalent of a collage, found poetry is often made from newspaper articles, street signs, graffiti, speeches, letters, or even other poems.”

(<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/found-poem-poetic-form>)

If students are making found poems from other students' messages, it's important that they don't change the essential meaning of the message. They might choose to use only some of the original words of the message but they should try not to add their own words. Their role is to be the microphone for the message: to amplify it by making it stand out more; catch people's attention more easily and stick in readers' minds longer.

When making found poems from the messages, it's a good idea to start by copying out interesting or unusual phrases. Look for patterns: repetitions, rhythms, rhymes or half-rhymes. Found poems rarely rhyme and that's ok.

- Consider where the line breaks should be in the poem: long lines and short lines can influence how quickly we read a poem. Should this poem be slow and contemplative or fast and urgent?
- Which words should be at the ends of lines? These words usually hold our attention a little longer than words in the middle of a line – they are often more powerful.
- Should this poem be in one complete stanza or would it make sense to organize it in verses? How many?
- Lines of poetry can be indented to suggest flow within the poem. Often gaps can show hesitation or where information is missing. Is this technique relevant to your poem? Is there a sense of hesitation or things left unsaid in the message you're working with?

Find out more about found poetry at: (<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/found-poem-poetic-form>)



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When creating found poems, it's often most natural to write in free verse (i.e. without a strict structure, metre or rhyme scheme). However, two forms can suit short found poems very well:

Haiku

Japanese haiku are 3-line poems where traditionally the lines are 5, 7 and 5 syllables long. However, many modern haiku use the three line simplicity of the form but do not adhere to the syllable count. It's a form that is well-suited to conveying a brief but important message, especially a text message or tweet. Look at the 'Thank You haiku' on the Mixed Messages blog for examples of text message haiku.

<https://mixedmessagespoetry.wordpress.com/2016/08/31/mixed-messages-poems-11-12-thank-you-haiku/>

List poems

As you might expect, list poems take the form of lists – shopping lists, to do lists, pros and cons lists etc. The challenge is to make your list poem into a poem and not just a list. You can do this by including imaginative descriptions in your list, careful use of rhyme and rhythm and listing unusual items. A list for Santa Claus might include a PS4 and a Scalextric. A list poem for Santa Claus might include a Scalextric that buzzes loudly enough to attract the local bees.

You can find examples of list poems at:

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/bleezers-ice-cream>

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/sick>

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/list-praises>

<http://www.poetrybyheart.org.uk/poems/for-i-will-consider-my-cat-jeoffry/>



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Activity 1: Saying Thanks

Tell students that today we are sending messages of thanks – maybe we forgot to say thank you to someone or maybe they disappeared before we could thank them. Sometimes we don't feel thankful for someone else's actions at the time and only recognize our gratitude later.

Tell pupils about something you want to say thank you for. If you don't want to do this, you can use the Mixed Messages blog about my broken hand as an example: <https://mixedmessagespoetry.wordpress.com/2016/06/01/giving-thanks/>

The messages

Ask students to think quietly about a time that they feel thankful for. What exactly are they grateful for? Who do they want to say thanks to? Why is it so important to them?

When students have thought about their message – what they want to say and to whom, it's time to write /speak the messages. Remind the students that they are not writing a poem yet. They should write or speak in regular prose, although they can make that descriptive and use simile or metaphor if they want. The important thing is that the message is honest and heartfelt.

The poems

Read some examples of thank you poems with students before they do their own writing. The Mixed Messages 'Thank You haiku' are examples of brief messages that have been cut up into poems but still convey the meaning and tone of the original inspirations: <https://mixedmessagespoetry.wordpress.com/2016/08/31/mixed-messages-poems-11-12-thank-you-haiku/>

There are different ways to approach the writing. Either:

- Students use their own messages and turn them into poems or;
- Students swap messages within the class and use the words from someone else's message to create a poem.

Finished poems can be shared with the class aloud, or put on display – messages and poems can be kept anonymous if students prefer.



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Activity 2: Saying Sorry

This activity invites students to apologise. Their apologies could be serious or comic, important or trivial. Did someone borrow their sister's jacket without asking and then spill coke on it? Were they mean to a friend who was having a tough time?

Talk to students about an example where you felt the need to say sorry. Or, with older students, you could share the following message from the Mixed Messages blog <https://mixedmessagespoetry.wordpress.com/2016/05/24/sorry-is-it-the-hardest-word-to-say/>:

'Sometimes I think back and you were there and then you weren't. I didn't even notice until you came back again. I hadn't thought to look for you, hadn't thought of you until you walked back into school half the girl you were before. The sun shone right through you. You were so frail that I worried you'd snap but really I knew you'd snapped already. I'm sorry I did nothing, thought of nothing but myself.'

The messages

Ask students to mull over an incident that they want to say sorry for. Reassure them that they are not going to get into trouble! What are they sorry about? Who do they need to apologise to? Why didn't they say sorry sooner?

When students have thought about their messages, it's time to write /speak them. Remind students that they are not writing poems yet. They should write or speak in regular prose, although that can be descriptive. The important thing is that the message is honest and heartfelt. Also remind them to be mindful of the anonymity of the person they are apologizing to.

The poems

Have a look at some poems that say sorry such as 'Lost'
<https://mixedmessagespoetry.wordpress.com/2016/08/12/mixed-messages-poem-6lost/>

'Sorry, sorrier still' is only suitable for older students. It is a composite poem made up of lots of different messages.

<https://mixedmessagespoetry.wordpress.com/2016/08/10/mixed-messages-poem-5-sorry-sorrier-still/>

- Students use their own messages and turn them into poems; or
- Students swap messages within the class and use the words from someone else's message to create a poem.

As with 'Sorry, sorrier still', maybe some of your class's apology messages would work well together in a longer poem? This could be written as a group activity or different composite poems could be written by individual students.



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Activity 3: Talking about Love

Just to clarify – this doesn't necessarily mean romantic love. Indeed you and your students might prefer that romantic love is NOT an option for this activity! Students might want to share their love for a family member but some of the most interesting and original writing from this prompt has been messages of love for a place, an animal, a book or film.

Share something or somewhere that you love with the students – maybe your hometown, your puppy, or the bewitching world of knitting. Tell them why it means so very much to you. If you don't want to share an example of your own, the following example from the Mixed Messages blog might be suitable for older students.

<https://mixedmessagespoetry.wordpress.com/2016/06/27/a-love-letter-to/>

'Dear Warsaw,

It took us a while to find each other's rhythms, to jigsaw our edges together, but we got there. I found you with the peacocks, sulky but bright on crisp, snowy mornings in Łazienki Park. I found you at 3am in Stodoła, both of us soaked in stale beer and dance music. And you found me. And you found her. And she and I found each other. She and I have each other still. Still jigsawed, clicked together but now we find we might lose you. I never thought that could happen. What is the Polish for 'taken for granted'? I only know "Kocham cię".'

The messages

Ask students to mull over something or somewhere that they love. What do they love? Why? What are the positives about this thing or place? Are there any negatives?

When students have thought about their message – what they want to say and to whom, it's time to write / speak the messages. While previous messages have emphasized anonymity, here it is probably appropriate to share details: if they love pizza, they should make clear whether it's Hawaiian or Pepperoni. If they love the beach, do they mean the sun-soaked sands of last summer's Mediterranean holiday or a small rocky cove in the Western Isles?

The poems

Have a look at some poems that are odes to places or objects. You can find place poems at <http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/tags/placebook-scotland>. You can find a poem suited to younger children which describes love for a sari at <http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/poems/my-mums-sari>

This activity probably lends itself best to students using their own messages and turning them into poems. However, if the group are inclined to swap messages, that can work too. It could be a great challenge for the student who really doesn't like dogs to turn a message about someone's cherished dachshund into a love poem!



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Activity 4: Going for the Messages

This might need a bit of explanation to anyone who doesn't know Scotland well! Here, 'going for the messages' or 'getting the messages in' means going to the shops, usually for groceries or everyday items. Need a loaf of bread and a ball of string? Better pop down to the local shop to get your messages.

This light-hearted activity explores this meaning of 'messages' and can be done in a short session if time is tight.

Look at examples of shopping poems with your students.

With younger students try Kenn Nesbitt's 'My parents sent me to the store', <http://www.poetry4kids.com/poems/my-parents-sent-me-to-the-store/>

With older students look at this extract from Jackie Kay's long poem 'Lochaline Stores', <http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/poems/lochaline-stores>

Generating poem ideas

Ask your students to think of a shopping list. They should start by thinking of some groceries that their family usually buys. Next ask them to think of some desirable foods that they don't have often (too expensive/unhealthy/not easily available). Then widen this to include non-food items that they would like (toys, clothes, gadgets). Finally, ask them to think of intangible things that they would like to put on their list – a year to travel round the world, a hug from their granny. These items could be impossible – a trip to the moon, tea with Queen Victoria. The only limit is their imaginations!

The poems

Immediately after the above activity, ask students to write down their shopping lists. They should record as much as they remember and can add in new items as well. When lists are complete, ask students to read them over. Do they want to choose one or two items from the list and write a poem that focuses on that? Or they could continue with a list poem, and look at how to redraft their existing list. They may want to move items around for better flow, to enhance rhyme and rhythm, or for serious or comic effect when strange items are juxtaposed.

Finished poems could be read aloud, recorded or displayed around the school.

At Mixed Messages we'd love to see examples of your Mixed Messages poems. Get in touch to share them either via mixedmessagespoetry@gmail.com or education@spl.org.uk. We might even post them on the blog!



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Text message template

Write the message you want to send as a text message in the box below. The challenge is keep your message to 160 characters but still make your point fully!

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