

# You Can... **Develop children's self-esteem using poetry and rhyme**

*Poetry and rhyme can be a lifeline for many struggling or reluctant readers in Key Stage 2. By the time these children have 'failed' to learn to read successfully for three years, they often 'know' they can't read and will reject the idea of themselves as readers. Try using poems and rhymes as a 'way in' for these children.*

## **Thinking points**

- Poems with set rhythms and rhymes are often useful for giving to struggling readers. Try limericks and poems with little rhyming couplets.
- Many suitable poems will be in anthologies for younger children, so type them out with spaces and ask children to draw illustrations. This gives them ownership of the rhymes as well as testing their comprehension of the poem.
- Try jokes and riddles. They are often very accessible while having high status among the class.

## **Links to Letters and Sounds**

Although it is written for Key Stage 1 teachers, *Letters and Sounds* ([www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/local/clld/las.html](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/local/clld/las.html)) can help you to cater for Key Stage 2 children who are not making appropriate progress in reading. It divides the teaching of phonics into six phases. Its key concepts are:

- Children should be taught to 'segment to spell': to orally sound words out, phoneme by phoneme, and count how many phonemes are in the word.
- Children should be taught to 'blend to read': to sound words out in their reading; they shouldn't be asked to read words that feature graphemes (letter patterns) with which they aren't yet familiar.

## **Tips, ideas and activities**

What do you think are the virtues of poems as texts for reluctant readers? Having identified your own top ten virtues for children in your class, exploit those features and support your children. Here are some ideas to start you thinking:

- Begin by looking for short poems. Unlike reading books, which tend to be levelled, poems cannot be grouped in this way because some of the most complex and concise poems are much more challenging than some longer easy poems. For struggling readers, brevity and ease combine to make a non-threatening text. If higher attaining readers are also reading short poems, then your struggling readers don't look as if they are reading anything that is different from the rest of the class.
- Search for poems with a fairly decodable text. Current thinking suggests that phonics should be taught as children's first strategy for reading unrecognised words. Assuming that you are continuing to teach phonics to these children, try to find poems that feature the current phonics focus. Increasingly, poets are writing for a younger audience and many are aiming to use more decodable words. Just because you find the poem in a book with illustrations for younger children, doesn't mean that you have to give it to your older readers in that form.
- Look for poems with rhyme and rhythm. Both of these features give great clues for a child who is trying to make an 'educated guess' at a word, since a lot of words are ruled out because they wouldn't fit. Moreover, if you read the poem aloud first, then the rhyme and the rhythm will provide additional clues for children to use memory as an aide to reading the poem.
- Find age-appropriate funny poems. Most of your class will probably appreciate funny poems and if your struggling readers are able to read, recite and remember some, they will gain status in the eyes of their peers.