
The Green Poetry Pack

by *Mario Petrucci*

POEMS & WRITING IDEAS WITH WHICH TO ENGAGE THE NATURAL WORLD & LOCAL SELF-SUFFICIENCY

(Target users: Year 9 and above; adults)

Through writing, discussion and the study of poetry, this pack explores a variety of approaches to ecology and nature. Commissioned for schools and creative writing courses, some of the poems were composed specifically for this project; others are reproduced from published books.

Notes to the teacher ...

- Many types of lesson plan can be derived from what follows; please select and adapt the material to suit your purposes. It is particularly important to study the poems in advance, choosing texts that best suit the experience and ability of your students. Sections C and D are probably better put before older and/or more able groups. Section E may be particularly useful in initiating or rounding off a session.
- There is a range of styles in these poems: some are direct; others are a little less transparent. They all stand as an invitation for students to wonder at language, to enter its world of associations and resonances. Poems which seem at first sight more 'difficult' often engender (eventually) a deeper and more rewarding response.
- Prime your study session by discussing aspects of the natural world having some bearing on the poems selected (see the Support Notes for more ideas). Cite any strongly linked themes, such as Global Warming or local organic farming; explore what the students know about them. Develop these issues via suitable material: videos, images, extracts from *bona fide* web sites, magazines, your own observations.
- The Support Notes also carry brief comments on each poem: these flesh out points of interest regarding content, but may also assist (where this is absolutely needed) with interpretation. Please avoid using these notes (or your own input) to 'explain' the poetry away, line by line. Certainly, they are not meant to dictate how any given poem may be responded to, or taught, in class – they are pertinent, but not definitive.
- You may choose to expand this resource by 'borrowing' poems (and their support notes) from the other ecological study packs on this site (such as *Poetry : the Environment* and *Biomimicry : Poetry*) which focus, more emphatically, on particular environmental developments and issues.
- A special, extended lesson plan has been provided for the poem 'Windmill' (see Support Notes, p.3). This includes role play, journalistic writing and a discussion of issues arising from local history, development, self-sufficiency and wind energy.
- At the end of your session, encourage students to research any given theme in their own time, or to do further writing privately in response to it.

Notes to the student (or Foyle Young Poet) ...

If you are working on this pack outside class, by all means go for it. But, if you do get stuck at all, talk with a parent or teacher. Also, see if you can get together with some writing friends for those parts involving group work.

Part I: Preparation for Writing; Initial Discussion.

1. Select, together, two or more poems from the pack. Have (different) students read these – aloud – to the whole class. Ensure each poem gets more than one reader.
2. Which poems (or parts of poems) focus on something specific or tangible (e.g. a named place or thing)? By contrast, where is the poetry springing mainly from a point of view, or via a story? What are the strengths of either approach? Discuss favourite images and lines.
3. Is the argument behind each poem fairly clear? Which images or ideas in the poem strike us with absolute clarity? Alternatively, do certain lines seem strange and puzzling? Instead of seeing those passages as some kind of riddle you have to solve, explore together the impact of their sound and associations. Do they persuade us to engage more profoundly with language, to struggle with what we already know?

Part II: Some Green writing ideas ...

(Suggestions for students, either for individual classwork or as follow-up)

1. Which poem most helps you to feel or think differently about its theme? How so? Does it draw you into its world and make you thoughtful, or is its main effect to excite and provoke you? Jot down your responses to that poem, including *your own* insights arising from it. Compose something, and structure it, to capture what you find.
2. Which poem do you most want to go back to, privately, to read again? What qualities in that poem make you want to revisit it? Having read it several times, does it reward patience? Write something that incorporates any thoughts or feelings that emerge.
3. Pick a single object, or idea, from any poem in this pack. Make notes on it: your reactions, memories, images, imaginings. Do some research. The notes can be messy and fragmentary, or coherent and clear, depending on what is going on in your head.
When ready, turn your notes into a voice, or voices, either in a poem (as a monologue or conversation) or in prose (as a speech or dialogue). Do any of the supplied poems help you in creating a good voice? If so, do you want to: (a) imitate that voice; or (b) make something entirely your own? What are the pros and cons of each approach?
4. Go outside: search for writing ideas by observing nature. Take your time.
5. Are we an integral *part* of nature, or do we simply *use* it? Write a poem in answer.

Part III: Editing

(Group/ Class Work)

- Allow time for most of the class to produce a first draft. Ask for a few of these to be read out to the group, encouraging readers not to read too fast or under the breath. Allow silences. Go deeply into what is happening in each poem. What can we learn from one another's work? How is our own writing enriched by hearing other voices?
- Discuss (constructively) what alterations might be made to each poem, to deepen or assist its effect (if it helps, ask for the author to read out the draft again). House rule: authors are barred from the discussion of their work, at least initially. (Why?)
- Is there agreement over the suggestions being made? Do the proposed changes amplify the poem's capacity to show us something, or is some essential quality about to be lost in the editing? Is a better balance now struck between mystery and clarity?
- Towards the end of each discussion, invite the (so far) silenced author to respond.
- Now run a plenary redrafting session. Those who did not have their work worked over can still apply insights from the discussion to their own drafts. Or pair students up for a while, to edit their partner's text. At a suitable point, ask for some first and second drafts to be read out, side by side, for comparison. Discuss.

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Support Notes

Preparation; comments on the poems; some teaching suggestions.

Special lesson plan: *Windmill* ... Literacy, role play & writing; poetry coursework & study; local history.

Student's notes ...

Mario Petrucci trained as a physicist and ecologist before becoming a freelance educator and poet. His award-winning collections reflect his scientific and environmental concerns: they include *Bosco* (2001), *Heavy Water: a poem for Chernobyl* (2004) and *Flowers of Sulphur* (2007) [www.mariopetrucci.com].

The Green Poetry Pack

Section A *Soil, energy, self-sufficiency: the land*

POEM 1 *Untitled...*

Even this Earth
must yield a little
at every step we take.
Can't you feel? –

or hear our dead:
their tiny time-
shrunk moans
filtering up

through clay, loam
made dense with flesh
and bone – just
to support us?

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From: *Fearnought: Poems for Southwell Workhouse*
(The National Trust, 2006)

The Green Poetry Pack

Section A *Soil, energy, self-sufficiency: the land*

POEM 2

DROPPING BY

It could have been that meadow
under the Abruzzi, down by
the stream, shaded by sycamore
and fig. Smell of dank.

It was all there in the broadness
of your back, the way one leg
eased forward behind the hoe;
an earth-change for fallow and weed

the swelling and root-feel
of the seed deep-planted in you
remaking the land in the image
of what you are.

You hadn't seen me arrive;
waver. I left you
stooped over cabbages – bright
buttons on a sleeve of clay.

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From: *Shrapnel and Sheets* (Headland, 1996).

Winner of a Poetry Book Society Recommendation.

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Section A Soil, energy, self-sufficiency: the land

POEM 3

Seedwoman

Each tiny face has its look:
the black-shiny. The varnishy-brown.
The specks too – it's like telling stars
apart, rolling them thumb to palm.

These? *Dark Cumin*. I've known
mothers cross mountains, leave babies
for a pinchful of this black gold. But it's
not just getting hold – you have to

know when. To bury them. Never
with a moon waxing do you sow.
Some we still have. Some – all
lost. Their wild relations

mob the fields. Ah now –
the only furrow not worth having's
the one in your brow. Come. Try
– on your tongue. Just one. Feel

those fins. Now bite. That's
Fennel. And this brown box can
green a garden. A nation. You know
the song: *Seedwoman! It's never*

over till her fat caddy slims!

caddy – a small storage container

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Section A *Soil, energy, self-sufficiency: the land*

POEM 4

fungi

one white knuckle
rising through
peat &

through
woodchips four
pink toes ascend in

order my hooded
brothers &
sisters

hurrying
on the spot
bowed to the east

towards matins whose
low-slung sun
I lift

a hand
to letting blood
-light filter through

Lactarius
pubescens *Leccinum*
roseofractum *Amanita virosa*
Agaricus augustus

Bearded
milkcap *Blushing*
bolete *Destroying angel*
The Prince

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The Green Poetry Pack

Section B *Soil, energy, self-sufficiency: local energies*

POEM 5 *Untitled...*

Flint as a hatchet, adze and axe
Flint for a knife – as a cutter or rasp
Flint to shear the shin of a roe
to draw its pink-white grub of marrow

Flint for the arrowhead, barbed
or leaf-shaped – flint as a scraper
for wood and for skins – Dagger-flint
broken-off between ribs Flint

as hammerhead, mace and gouge
Flint as mother of horn and bone
Flint as father buried in a barrow
and deep in the Ape-brain – a single flake

adze – axe-like tool, with blade at right angles to handle

barrow – ancient burial mound

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Excerpt from the sequence 'Thames', in:
The Stamina of Sheep (London Borough of Havering, 2002).

Winner: Essex Book Awards (2000-2002) 'Best Fiction' Prize.

The Green Poetry Pack

Section B *Soil, energy, self-sufficiency: local energies*

POEM 6

SOAP

*Nonna, too, takes a head-basket – all work here –
back straight and elegant, hoping nothing gives.
I watch kettles boil, the cask under pressure,
sacks crammed with shiny black beetles of olives.
Green honey, she says – ladles; bottles. Thicker
slime remains: mixed with ash and soda, it's heaved
to the fireplace. Licked by flame, it blurts for hours.
Caked in the sun; cut like goat's-cheese with a wire.
Soap like my heart, leached white and small. So hard. Pure.*

Nonna – grandma

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Excerpt from the sequence 'Sheets', in: *Shrapnel and Sheets*
(Headland, 1996). *Poetry Book Society Recommendation.*

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Section B *Soil, energy, self-sufficiency: local energies*

POEM 7

WINDMILL

Look at me! I'm a crossed-out space!
A Dalek in white armour. Shake – say *hi*
to Nature's greatest fan. I'm 'X' that marks
this spot. A massive vote in favour of the sky.

Crank me up and I'll recycle kilowatt-hours
from the gas of every good intention.
How? Don't fret! It'll be a breeze –
just get MPs to talk in my direction.

Oh – how I want that gust to grip
my cogs again and wobble my angles
all to jelly. My four stone hearts pumping
flour and shoeing mice like grey corpuscles

and frosting the spider with my white breath
and making every gallery strut so bony.
Yes – I could be that hill-top revolution!
Three square meals. Your full belly.

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The original version of this poem was published in:
The Stamina of Sheep (London Borough of Havering, 2002).

Winner: Essex Book Awards (2000-2002) 'Best Fiction' Prize.

The Green Poetry Pack

(more advanced)

Section C *Life's long journey: from the stars...*

POEM 8

How stars flare

with white blood my
blued blood
bled

light
led in circles
from which moons or

eyes might forge them
selves – night's
cold

hammers
that raise no
heat at distance

towering more time
than space
this

upward
distance my
dust has come

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The Green Poetry Pack

(more advanced)

Section C *Life's long journey: from the stars...*

POEM 9

dust the size

of pollen sieved from
one star to
ours—

beak
to beak as
a hen of smoke to its
smoke chick

soon slow gravity
in aggregating
disc

water
later— its
blue engine its planet
cycling

carbon
begins nips
that amino tail
i n t o lengthening

(chains)

nitrogen
phosphorus
selenium
zinc

these
my ancestors microscopic
in their sappy rooms
digesting

then
now
my cells
singled out thus
composed

mothered
atom upon atom
tissue on tissue fathered
life after

life my
womb— yours— this
size
of night

The Green Poetry Pack

(more advanced)

Section D *Life's long journey: ... to the trees*

POEM 10

Batteries

(a riddle of sorts)

power here all
its frills : flower shade &
breeze – though never for
daffodils' plastic

snipping cloud to lace
with each recharging stint
they take up tonnes of space –
that's their point

one coppery giant
unplugged last fall – another
felled : already the raw white base
sizzles green filaments

chair rifle-butt fire?
we are the wires

such batteries as these
possessed of processes that
cannot be bought do not charge
to please— but take so long I own
my senses come to them am
brought to my knees

*Mild winters are causing Lake District daffodils to bloom too early for the tourist season.
As a result, some sites are replacing the natural flowers with silk or plastic replicas.*

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The Green Poetry Pack

(more advanced)

Section D *Life's long journey: ... to the trees*

POEM 11

for the first – or last – tree

your green in these eyes

must be what you're sprouting to
make food for yourself down
implicate pathways of sun
corpuscled / muscled
by light fuelling
down through
seen-through veins
where sap's thicker-than
rises drawn from the mantle
to meet & merge with sun's work
done as though you were an upward
well our balled rock steadied in space by
a single green gaze guyed in place by this sol
-itary showing of leaves all spindled on your trunk

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The Green Poetry Pack

(more advanced)

Section D *Life's long journey: ... to the trees*

POEM 12

Assembling a Tree

(after Edwin Brock, 'Five Ways to Kill a Man')

There are many pointless ways to assemble a tree.
You can heave planks of wood
to a hilltop fort and nail them together. To do this
properly you require a crowd of
commentators carrying cameras, a stopwatch and one
bolt of lightning.

Or you can take a lengthy research project, shaped and
chased in an entrepreneurial way, boasting
the full set-up of alloy rods and electrified cages. But for
this you need blue-sky funding, not to mention
Parliamentary blind eyes, backhanders for questions, sole
backing of a Welsh Prince, a mess of laboratory
rats sprouting velvety leaves for ears and a considerable
sliver of luck.

Dispensing with that, you may, if the spirits allow, blow
life into a plastic one – but then you need
a thousand miles of microscopic capillary pumping artificial
sap, an inland ocean of hydroponic support,
nanotech solar panels hammered into little grey, ear-like ovals
and some green paint.

In an age of synthetic xylem, you may ply a billion sheets
to less than millimetre thickness to be
replaced (preferably) annually – a world of scientists
huddled round their totem sections
of ersatz trunk applying the pale waistcoats in time.
(Plus a patent xylem welder.)

These are, as I began, pointless ways to assemble a tree.
Squirrels and simpletons have taken a seed,
the living seed, sunk it in the middle of an open field
and left it there.

hydroponic – cultivated in nutrient solution rather than in soil

xylem – the supporting and water-conducting tissue beneath bark

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[P.T.O. for the **partner poem** to the above ...]

Five Ways to Kill a Man

by *Edwin Brock*

There are many cumbersome ways to kill a man:
you can make him carry a plank of wood
to the top of a hill and nail him to it. To do this
properly you require a crowd of people
wearing sandals, a cock that crows, a cloak
to dissect, a sponge, some vinegar and one
man to hammer the nails home.

Or you can take a length of steel,
shaped and chased in a traditional way,
and attempt to pierce the metal cage he wears.
But for this you need white horses,
English trees, men with bows and arrows,
at least two flags, a prince and
a castle to hold your banquet in.

Dispensing with nobility, you may, if the wind
allows, blow gas at him. But then you need
a mile of mud sliced through with ditches,
not to mention black boots, bomb craters,
more mud, a plague of rats, a dozen songs
and some round hats made of steel.

In an age of aeroplanes, you may fly
miles above your victim and dispose of him by
pressing one small switch. All you then
require is an ocean to separate you, two
systems of government, a nation's scientists,
several factories, a psychopath and
land that no one needs for several years.

These are, as I began, cumbersome ways
to kill a man. Simpler, direct, and much more neat
is to see that he is living somewhere in the middle
of the twentieth century, and leave him there.

From: *Five Ways to Kill a Man: New and Selected Poems*
(Enitharmon Press, 1990). By kind permission of the publisher.

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The Green Poetry Pack

Section E *Unity with nature*

POEM 13

today i could go

out to dress myself in
nature : these
annular

pupils
borrowing
fish-rings from

rivers so like them
i would ever
widen &

inner ear
little-boned &
oboe-keyed might

pilfer a leaf from sheet-
music trees or
skin

grow up
past low-flying
geese bumping qu-

ills to fledge answering
zephyr – or some
aroma full

of city
scribe its corner
in me or salt in its pans

be pepper & crust of me – oh
if each going out
were only

home
coming to its yard
or two of matter whose

dark & light meet in
me & make
shade

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From: *Feeling the Pressure: Poetry and Science
of Climate Change* (British Council, 2008)

The Green Poetry Pack

Section E *Unity with nature*

POEM 14

SOLDIER, SOLDIER

*Friend, everything came
together to make us upright, warm.*

*Hold firm – soil looking on soil.
We will never happen again.*

*How on earth withhold
an embrace? Or guide*

the rifle-butt home?

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From: *Flowers of Sulphur* (Enitharmon, 2007).

Winner of the Arts Council of England Writers' Award.

Support Notes for ‘The Green Poetry Pack’

Support for Sections A and B

Soil, energy, self-sufficiency ...

Preparation and Introductory Discussion

As fossil fuels decline, local self-sufficiency becomes more attractive, if not crucial – and not just in rural areas. If our global growth economy is to slow successfully into a series of overlapping, regional, non-growth economies, there will need to be more emphasis on our relationships with (and production through) local ecosystems. This scenario is termed **Powerdown**, whereby neighbourhood initiatives – such as local crafts, small holdings and food production – spring up as the global carbon economy falters, giving communities greater resilience against external shortages and resource crises. An initial impetus for this may well be higher oil prices driving up transport and manufacturing costs.

If this sounds like a dull or depressing agenda for class activity, far from it. Communities growing away from dependence on the global economy will need to be adaptable, ingenious and creative. As well as bringing the benefits of communal interdependence and self-reliance, the very exercise of these skills will enhance life quality. The concerns raised above, though daunting, can therefore be approached positively – and poetry provides the perfect medium through which the required awareness, imagination and communicative motivation can flourish.

Of course, most students will need priming. Begin, for example, with some simple instances of local self-sufficiency: allotments, or the use of town gardens in wartime (see the *Grow Your Own Food* posters of the Second World War). These provide effective launching points for discussion or warm-up writing prior to addressing the poems in this pack. For further study, suggested themes include:

Powerdown	<i>Richard Heinberg</i>
Transition Towns / Transition Initiatives	<i>Rob Hopkins</i>
Biomimicry	<i>Janine Benyus</i>
Biogas / Biodigestors	<i>various sources</i>

To find out more, search for the listed authors’ books or browse YouTube, Wikipedia and Google. For Biomimicry and other key Green issues, substantial packs are available on this site (***Biomimicry : Poetry*** and ***Poetry : the Environment***). Of course, do decide for yourself how much of this is relevant as background to the poems you have chosen to study, or as ballast for the various issues those poems raise. Even in a ‘pure’ creative writing scenario, however, some such discussion can seed new writing by providing stimulating situations, stories and concepts.

The poems

The first poem in Section A, ‘*Even this Earth...*’, draws attention to our enduring relationship with soil and is a good candidate for opening or ending a writing session. Most of our sustenance comes, directly or indirectly, from the land; even the sea is fertilised by sediments and run-off. Our entire planet is an organism recycling nutrients and organic matter. So, the phrase used at funerals – “ashes to ashes, dust to dust” – can be seen positively: our bodies are recycled, in part, from our ancestors and into our progeny. The moaning of “our dead”, in the poem, does not necessarily arise from isolation or pain. If we are what we eat, we are soil. Darkly, richly, the poem celebrates that fact.

‘**Dropping By**’ (**Poem 2**) is from the author’s collection *Shrapnel and Sheets*. There, it sits within a cluster of poems exploring his Italian family and his parents’ post-war immigration to Britain. Avoid announcing this context, however, as though it were ‘inside information’ essential to an appreciation of the poem; if possible, allow students to arrive, unaided, at the implied backstory (better still, they might suggest their own plausible interpretations). The opening stanza certainly invokes a rural space abroad (the Abruzzi form part of Italy’s ‘spine’), one that is familiar to the poem’s narrator (“that meadow”). What seems likely, then, is that someone (probably immigrant and elderly) is working a

patch of land in the UK, watched by an unannounced visitor. It is not uncommon for farmers to tend a garden or allotment when they move abroad. Why might they do that, even when supermarket food is easily available? And what is the likely (unspecified) relationship between the two characters in this poem? (Note: the context in *Shrapnel and Sheets* makes it fairly clear that the speaker is a son, though this fact need not be mentioned to students.) What emotions are suggested by the narrator's tone and choice of words – awe, respect, nostalgia, embarrassment? Explore the winding nuances of image and meaning in lines 8-12. Why do you think the visitor goes unnoticed (line 13)? Why didn't he/she interrupt, and why "waver"? Was something communicated, in spite of there being no verbal contact on this occasion? How might *you* feel, or react, in a similar situation? Why?

Why do most people in cities and developed nations know so little about seeds? '**Seedwoman**' (**Poem 3**) is set in a time and place where seed stock is incredibly valuable (see stanza 2). What does that single fact tell you about the world of the poem? Explore the possible meanings of "leave babies" (line 6)? The names of seeds are capitalized in this poem – why? What do *we* know (today) as "black gold" (line 7) and how does this pun amplify the poem's implied context: a future, post-oil, agrarian world? Thinking again, could this story be set in *our* time? Who is Seedwoman speaking to, in your opinion, and what is she trying to get across? What does her gentle play on words, in lines 14-15, tell you about her? What issues are suggested through the poet's choice of a woman as the main character? How effectively does the poem communicate one of its key ideas on human nature: that we take pains to study and understand precious commodities (stanza 1 & lines 9-10)? Is this always so, or are there core resources we tend to neglect (list examples)? With seeds, what are we now in danger of losing? How does the poem bring them to life for us? Discuss the possible significance of the 'caddy' song (last two lines). What happens near the end, with the fennel seed? Try it yourself.

'**fungi**' (**Poem 4**) begins with a pair of strongly visual images linking the appearance of emerging mushrooms and toadstools to parts of the body. How do the opening three stanzas point us to our relationship with soil, decay and the interdependence of species? [*Given their overlapping concerns, you might study this poem alongside 'Even this Earth...' (Poem 1) or 'Soldier, Soldier' (Poem 14).*] When the speaker lifts a hand to the sun to see 'bloodlight' filter through it (stanza 6), what ecological connection is being signalled? What do you visualize in stanzas 3 & 4? Discuss the mixed religious references ("bowed to the east// towards matins") picked up, later, by the use of Latin. Closing with a strange litany, the poem lists the Latin names, then the common names, of several fungi (these may be researched at home or in class). What thoughts and sensations do these suggestive names provoke?

Poems 5, 6 & 7 explore the role of 'local energies' in self-sufficiency. They certainly do not exhaust the subject, but do serve to introduce the overall idea...

- '**Flint as a hatchet...**' takes us back to the early stages of human survival, describing the prehistoric use of flint for basic tools during an ice age. Notice how the action of striking flint against flint is imitated through repetition and the rhythmic stressing of the lines (be sure to capture this when reading the piece out loud). Is the poem trying to suggest that we may soon collapse to a primitive (and violent) state of affairs; or is it emphasising the survival instinct we can all rely on: that "single flake" stored "deep in the Ape-brain"?
- '**Soap**' gives one version of how the product was made using traditional means (do add to this your own research on the chemistry and processes of soap-making). What were the essential ingredients here? What was "Green honey" and why do you think it was so described (this has nothing to do with any *actual* sweetness)? There are many clues in the text concerning the time period of the poem and its living conditions for the (Italian) peasantry (e.g. "all work here", "hoping nothing gives"; the head-basket, fireplace and goats). They were clearly skilled in making what they needed. What were the (mixed) blessings for all that hard work, as suggested in the last line?
- '**Windmill**' gives voice to a disused windmill and its yearning to be productive again. As well as a certain amount of humour and pathos, the poem provides a base from which to raise awareness of local history and developmental issues through discussion and role play. A special lesson plan is provided (overleaf) to do this, with scope to compose effective prose as well as poetry, and encouragement to engage in close reading of the poem.

SPECIAL LESSON PLAN for 'Windmill'

Literacy, role play and writing; poetry coursework and study; local history.

1. Background information and preparation

This poem celebrates the 200th anniversary of an impressive, four-sailed 'smock' mill in Upminster, built to take advantage of high bread prices during the Napoleonic Wars. Essex County Council acquired the mill in 1937 with the initial aim of demolishing it and redeveloping the land; but a public outcry ensued and the mill was saved. It was later given the status of a listed building, thereby gaining a degree of protection.

- In a library, or online, dig for information on any windmill in your area. Where exactly is it? What is its history? Why is it still in existence, do you think? If you are unable to visit the real windmill, or if it is too far, find out what you can by other means.
- Make sure you look at some images of windmills. Are there many types? Are four sails common?
- What is a 'kilowatt-hour'?
- How do windmills work? What were they used for? (Wikipedia might help on both counts.) Are old windmills used in the modern world at all? How do they compare with today's wind turbines?

2. The poem

WORDS Find nouns and verbs in the piece having more than one meaning ('fan' and 'crank' are examples of this). Why do you think the poem makes so much use of punning words?

IMAGES The windmill begins with a list of things it is like. Can you visualize them? Discuss what these opening images point us to. Explore, too, the richly suggestive images in lines 9 to 14.

FORM Examine the use of true rhyme and 'off rhyme' in this poem. Put forward possible reasons for the regular, repetitive (4-line) stanzas. (Clue: refer to images of common types of windmill.)

TECHNIQUE Is there a shift in tone and pace, halfway through the poem? If so, how does the poet achieve it? Do you have any ideas on why this shift is made to happen?

CONTENT Why do you think the poem makes so much of an old windmill? Do you agree with the windmill's view of politicians (stanza 2)? At the poem's close, what is the windmill trying to tell us?

3. Discussion

With global oil and gas reserves in decline, might the poem's message become more relevant to us as time passes? Could we see more wind-powered structures being built in certain types of location? Do you think *old-style* windmills might ever be used again, or are they just a 'dated' technology? Why would windmills (or modern wind turbines) be important for small, self-sufficient communities?

4. Role play and writing (*student instructions*)

- You are a journalist. You have heard that your local windmill is going to be bulldozed to make way for a new development (e.g. a shopping mall). List the advantages and disadvantages of saving the windmill, or of going ahead with the development.
- Remember: as a journalist you must be interesting, keep to the point, and be easy to read. It helps if there is strong 'human interest' in your story, and lots of provocative quotes. Good images or photographs really help too, and snippets of local history. You might even include a poem!
- When ready, write up your story. Why not turn it into a miniature front page? Think of a great headline. Present your story to your teacher or class.
- After the role play has ended, compose a poem of your own on any of the issues raised.

Notes for teachers

You can divide the class into small groups representing various camps in the debate: developers, council reps, businesses and investors, local interest groups, media. Arrange ways for pupils to get the information they need. There can be interviews and meetings (among the small groups themselves, but also with role-playing staff or suitable speakers from outside the school). Run a press conference.

Does the development go ahead? (For the purposes of the role play, assume your mill is not a listed building.) Put together the next morning's headlines and papers. You can run a similar exercise, with a choice having to be made between developing a portion of local waste land either as a wind farm (using modern turbines) or some other development (say, housing, shops or agriculture). What is the outcome?

Support for Sections C and D: *Life's long journey ...*

These Sections are perhaps best reserved for older or more able groups. Some of the poetry is fairly straightforward; most of it might be thought 'difficult' at first – but is more concerned with being poetry than with plain exposition. So, begin by simply enjoying the sound and movement. Keep an open mind to any signals and impressions as they arise; be prepared to read a text over and over, letting the leaps of imagery connect and deepen. List your reactions; annotate the poem's margins; build up a larger picture. How does re-reading and annotation help you get to grips with the text? This process might be described as an *associative* reading method: i.e. feeling your way for resonances and associations rather than seeking obvious, linear meanings. The approach can lead naturally into a more general discussion on the possibility of different ways of reading, of listening (and not just in poetry). Where line breaks or syntax really do challenge the group, it is especially important to render that text vocally, out loud, in as many ways as possible, to maximise the sense (this is not the same as simply making sense *of* it). Explore how the ambiguities enrich the poem.

Poems 8 and 9 are complex, impressionistic pieces that choose to wind and flow through a series of images rather than use straight logic. To touch our cosmic origins, they reach for deep subtleties of language. Here, line breaks are a crucial ingredient: choose any segment of text and discuss how the breaks work, line by line. Content is important too, of course. Follow the sense of wonder threading the lines, connecting the evolution of stars and galaxies with the elements that make up our bodies. What are your impressions concerning the “upward/ distance my/ dust has come” (end of Poem 8)? In what ways are “my/ womb— yours”, and how can that womb be “this/ size/ of night” (Poem 9)?

It may be helpful to provide some basic materials (especially diagrams) illustrating the recycling of matter through stars and how this leads to planetary systems containing the heavier elements necessary for life. Libraries often have something usefully accessible, and there is plenty on the web.

Poem 10 is only a riddle “of sorts” because its context does rather give away that these ‘batteries’ are trees, charging up on sunlight to make wood. Electrical imagery flashes through this poem: with each growth season’s “recharging stint”, leaves cut lace-like silhouettes against cloud; the canopy (or root ball?) of an autumn tree “unplugged”, presumably, by a storm (a reference to Climate Change?) makes a “coppery giant”; the stump of another tree, cut or blown down, “sizzles green filaments” of fresh shoots. But how are we (humans) like wires for the battery (line 14)? What sense of time (as measured by trees) is expressed in the closing lines? Finally, how does the speaker’s response at the end of the poem relate to the opening stanza’s tourist-serving “daffodils’ plastic” (see the poem’s footnote)? ‘**your green in these eyes**’ (**Poem 11**) opens with a scientist’s intimate awareness of photosynthesis, at work in the ‘you’ of a tree which acquires (by the poem’s end) a near-spiritual centrality with regards to our planet. What do you make of this? How are trees undervalued?

Special support for **Poem 12: *Assembling a Tree*** (+ partner poem by Edwin Brock)

A key decision here is whether to study one poem first or both in parallel. There is no preferred mode; but, if the latter option is chosen, it may be useful to begin by establishing points of similarity and difference between the two pieces. Which of Brock’s ideas and structures have been most closely adopted? Discuss possible reasons for Petrucci using an existing (and well-known) poem in this way.

Petrucci’s poem consists of a procession of stanzas, each more ludicrous than the last in illustrating how far technology falls short of matching the primary functions of natural species (such as tree growth). Is the poem, however, *necessarily* suggesting that experimental bio-technologies are a waste of time, that *all* technology is “pointless”? What point, then, is being made in the final stanza?

Support for Section E: *Unity with nature*

Poems 13 and 14 draw us into a compelling exploration of ecological unity. ‘**today i could go**’ steps into nature with a potent sense of connection and awe, merging the speaker with the ‘outside’ world in an attempt to fully feel and appreciate it. Bringing parts of the body into direct correspondence with aspects of nature, it recognises that the matter we contain calls to its cousin forms of rivers, trees, birds, air, shorelines. With this in mind, what might be the environmental message of the final image? ‘**Soldier, Soldier**’ makes a more direct appeal to the reader, using a deep eco-consciousness to challenge the continuance of warfare. How are the two soldiers in this short (but urgent) poem, ultimately, related? On what level does the poem succeed in cutting across all the usual arguments for or against war? What is meant by “We will never happen again” and do you agree with that notion? Compare this piece with Wilfred Owen’s *Futility* and *Strange Meeting*.

