Hand Poems

Activity 1 - List Poem

List poems are relatively easy to write, but can have powerful effects by the use of repetition and the creation of unusual images and pairings of lines.

The process is simple, for example:

> *The hands that held me*
> *The hands that would not close*
> *The hands that prayed*
> *The hands that caressed weapons*
> *The hands that just caressed*
> *The hands that waved goodbye*
> *The hands that were not mine*
> *The hands that shed their skin*
> *The hands that fell in love...*

In this brief model, you can see how ideas commonly associated with hands are used as well as those that are more unexpected. There is a play on the word 'caressed' in lines 4 and 5 and this could be a regular feature within pairings of lines. Think about using positive and negative ideas/images throughout your poem.

Notice there is no attempt to rhyme! This is preferable in a poem like this, as rhyming is hard to produce in interesting and original ways, although you will see successful examples of this later on and be encouraged to practise this in particular patterns. A list poem's main effect comes from relentless repetition and contrasts produced by the way in which lines react to one another. The occasional rhyme in a list poem can have a positive effect – but generally you should steer clear (…and there's a good example of the potential problem!).

When writing your own, simply produce as many lines as you can without thinking too hard about each individual meaning. As mentioned above, do consider expected and unexpected associations with hands. Once you have a large list, you can think about rearranging the position of lines within the whole poem to generate the maximum impact of ideas and images.

Editing

This needs mentioning now. Always remember, good writing occurs at the creative, drafting phase **and** when you revisit your work to re-read and make alterations. After producing loads of initial List lines, you can at the editing stage rearrange their placing in the poem to produce dramatic contrasts, alter words within the lines to make meanings more precise or evocative, or just get rid of those lines that do not work. The editing process is a key discipline in the production of high quality writing.

Look out for **editing points** provided with models in other activities.