

The Roche School's

Poetry Recital Competition

Friday, 1st May 2026

Would you like to enter a poetry recital competition? You can recite a poem of your own choosing or choose one of the poems in this booklet. Learn it by heart if possible. There will be a prize for the Lower School winner and a prize for the winner of Upper School!

The Purple Cow

By Gelett Burgess

I never saw a Purple Cow,
I never hope to see one;
But I can tell you, anyhow,
I'd rather see than be one.

Mix a Pancake

by Christina Rossetti

Mix a pancake,
Stir a pancake,
Pop it in the pan;
Fry the pancake,
Toss the pancake—
Catch it if you can.

Cats

by Eleanor Farjeon

Cats sleep, anywhere,
Any table, any chair
Top of piano, window-ledge,
In the middle, on the edge,
Open drawer, empty shoe,
Anybody's lap will do,
Fitted in a cardboard box,
In the cupboard, with your frocks-
Anywhere! They don't care!
Cats sleep anywhere.

The River

by Valerie Bloom

The River's a wanderer,
A nomad, a tramp,
He never chooses one place
To set up his camp.
The River's a winder,
Through valley and hill
He twists and he turns,
He just cannot be still.
The River's a hoarder
And he buries down deep
Those little treasures
That he wants to keep. T
he River's a baby,
He gurgles and hums,
And sounds like he's happily
Sucking his thumbs.
The River's a singer,
As he dances along,
The countryside echoes
The notes of his song.
The River's a monster,
Hungry and vexed,
He's goggled up trees
And he'll swallow you next.

A Bird Came Down the Walk

By Emily Dickinson

A Bird came down the walk:
He did not know I saw;
He bit an angle-worm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw.

And then he drank a dew
From a convenient grass,
And then hopped sidewise to the wall
To let a beetle pass.

He glanced with rapid eyes
That hurried all abroad,—
They looked like frightened beads, I thought;
He stirred his velvet head

Like one in danger; cautious,
I offered him a crumb,
And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home

Than oars divide the ocean,
Too silver for a seam,
Or butterflies, off banks of noon,
Leap, splashless, as they swim.

Casabianca

by Felicia Hemans

The boy stood on the burning deck,
Whence all but he had fled;
The flame that lit the battle's wreck,
Shone round him o'er the dead.

Yet beautiful and bright he stood,
As born to rule the storm;
A creature of heroic blood,
A proud, though childlike form.

The flames rolled on – he would not go,
Without his father's word;
That father, faint in death below,
His voice no longer heard.

He called aloud – 'Say, father, say
If yet my task is done?'
He knew not that the chieftain lay
Unconscious of his son.

'Speak, father!' once again he cried,
'If I may yet be gone!'
– And but the booming shots replied,
And fast the flames rolled on.

Upon his brow he felt their breath
And in his waving hair;
And look'd from that lone post of death,
In still yet brave despair.

And shouted but once more aloud,
'My father! must I stay?'
While o'er him fast, through sail and shroud,
The wreathing fires made way.

They wrapped the ship in splendour wild,
They caught the flag on high,
And streamed above the gallant child,
Like banners in the sky.

There came a burst of thunder sound –
The boy – oh! where was he?
Ask of the winds that far around
With fragments strewed the sea!

With mast, and helm, and pennon fair,
That well had borne their part,
But the noblest thing which perished there,
Was that young faithful heart.

Time Transfixed

by Carol Ann Duffy

In the Thinking Room
at Childhood Hall,
the brown clock ticks
with the sound of the kiss
that my Grandma makes
against my cheek
again and again
when we first meet
after a week
of all the hours
that the brown clock's tick
has kissed away
today, to-
morrow, yesterday

are all the same
to the plum steam-train
that I sometimes hear
in the Thinking Room
at Childhood Hall –
it has no passengers at all,
till I grow old enough
and tall
to climb aboard
the plum steam-train
and blow a kiss
as I chuff away to to-
morrow, yesterday, today.

Please Do Not Feed the Animals

by Robert Hull

Please do not feed the ostriches
sandwiches

or the polar bears
éclairs.

Do not offer the wombats
kumquats

or the rattle-snakes
fruit-cakes.

Remember that piranhas
are not allowed bananas

or partridges
sausages.

Never approach a stork
with things on a fork

or the bustard
with a plate of custard

No leopard
likes anything peppered

and meerkats
dislike Kit Kats.

Remember that grapes
upset apes

and meringues
do the same for orang-utans.

Most importantly—
do not feed the cheetah

your teacher

Lone Dog

by Irene McLeod

I'm a lean dog, a keen dog, a wild dog and lone,
I'm a rough dog, a tough dog, hunting on my own!
I'm a bad dog, a mad dog, teasing silly sheep;
I love to sit and bay the moon and keep fat souls
from sleep.

I'll never be a lap dog, licking dirty feet,
A sleek dog, a meek dog, cringing for my meat.
Not for me the fireside, the well-filled plate,
But shut door and sharp stone and cuff and kick
and hate.

Not for me the other dogs, running by my side,
Some have run a short while, but none of them
would bide.
O mine is still the lone trail, the hard trail, the best,
Wide wind and wild stars and the hunger of the
quest.

The Witch

by Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

I have walked a great while over the snow,
And I am not tall nor strong.
My clothes are wet, and my teeth are set,
And the way was hard and long.
I have wandered over the fruitful earth,
But I never came here before.
Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the
door!

The cutting wind is a cruel foe.
I dare not stand in the blast.
My hands are stone, and my voice a groan,
And the worst of death is past.
I am but a little maiden still,
My little white feet are sore.
Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the
door!

Her voice was the voice that women have,
Who plead for their heart's desire.
She came—she came—and the quivering flame
Sunk and died in the fire.
It never was lit again on my hearth
Since I hurried across the floor,
To lift her over the threshold, and let her in at the
door.

Sick

By Shel Silverstein

"I cannot go to school today,"
Said little Peggy Ann McKay.
"I have the measles and the mumps,
A gash, a rash and purple bumps.
My mouth is wet, my throat is dry,
I'm going blind in my right eye.
My tonsils are as big as rocks,
I've counted sixteen chicken pox
And there's one more--that's seventeen,
And don't you think my face looks green?
My leg is cut--my eyes are blue--
It might be instamatic flu.
I cough and sneeze and gasp and choke,
I'm sure that my left leg is broke--
My hip hurts when I move my chin,
My belly button's caving in,
My back is wrenched, my ankle's sprained,
My 'pendix pains each time it rains.
My nose is cold, my toes are numb.
I have a sliver in my thumb.
My neck is stiff, my voice is weak,
I hardly whisper when I speak.
My tongue is filling up my mouth,
I think my hair is falling out.
My elbow's bent, my spine ain't straight,
My temperature is one-o-eight.
My brain is shrunk, I cannot hear,
There is a hole inside my ear.
I have a hangnail, and my heart is--what?
What's that? What's that you say?
You say today is. . .Saturday?
G'bye, I'm going out to play!"

Please Mrs Butler

By Allan Ahlberg

Please Mrs Butler
This boy Derek Drew
Keeps copying my work, Miss.
What shall I do?

Go and sit in the hall, dear.
Go and sit in the sink.
Take your books on the roof, my lamb.
Do whatever you think.

Please Mrs Butler
This boy Derek Drew
Keeps taking my rubber, Miss.
What shall I do?

Keep it in your hand, dear.
Hide it up your vest.
Swallow it if you like, my love.
Do what you think is best.

Please Mrs Butler
This boy Derek Drew
Keeps calling me rude names, miss.
What shall I do?

Lock yourself in the cupboard, dear.
Run away to sea.
Do whatever you can, my flower.
But *don't ask me*.

Bush Fire

By Jackie Kay

That fire, they said, was red as red as red
as red as a fox, your lips, a cherry;
that fire, they said spread and spread and spread,
faster than a cheetah or a nasty rumour;
that fire, they said, was hot, so hot, so hot,
hotter than lava or an African summer.

That fire, they said, was angry, very angry.
For three roaring days, it danced wildly, wildly,
wildly.
Wild as flamenco, strip the willow, a Highland fling.
That fire, they said, had a big bad mouth,
swearing, spluttering, 'Bring it on! Bring it on!'

That fire, they said, wolfed down the lot –
the lovely little homes, the trees, the land.
That fire, they said, left nothing behind at all:
one blackened trail, one sad scorched story.

Isn't My Name Magical?

By James Berry

Nobody can see my name on me.
My name is inside
and all over me, unseen
like other people also keep it.
Isn't my name magical?

My name is mine only.
It tells I am individual,
the one person it shakes
when I'm wanted.

Even if someone else answers
for me, my message hangs in air
haunting others, till it stops
with me, the right name.
Isn't your name and my name magic?

If I'm with hundreds of people
and my name gets called,
my sound switches me on to answer
like it was my human electricity.

My name echoes across playground,
It comes, it demands my attention.
I have to find out who calls,
who wants me for what.
My name gets blurted out in class,
it is terror, at a bad time,
because somebody is cross.

My name gets called in a whisper
I am happy, because
My name may have touched me
with a loving voice.
Isn't your name and my name magic?

Life Doesn't Frighten Me

by Maya Angelou

Shadows on the wall
Noises down the hall
Life doesn't frighten me at all

Bad dogs barking loud
Big ghosts in a cloud
Life doesn't frighten me at all

Mean old Mother Goose
Lions on the loose
They don't frighten me at all

Dragons breathing flame
On my counterpane
That doesn't frighten me at all.

I go boo
Make them shoo
I make fun
Way they run
I won't cry
So they fly
I just smile
They go wild

Life doesn't frighten me at all.

Tough guys fight
All alone at night
Life doesn't frighten me at all.

Panthers in the park
Strangers in the dark
No, they don't frighten me at all.

That new classroom where
Boys all pull my hair
(Kissy little girls
With their hair in curls)
They don't frighten me at all.

Don't show me frogs and snakes
And listen for my scream,
If I'm afraid at all
It's only in my dreams.

I've got a magic charm
That I keep up my sleeve
I can walk the ocean floor

And never have to breathe.

Life doesn't frighten me at all
Not at all
Not at all.

Life doesn't frighten me at all.

Damsel in Distress Rap

by John Agard

Bring on your shining armour, dude.
I'll be your damsel in distress with attitude.

I'll turn your hunk to butter
in a flutter of mascara
flood you in promises
of happy-ever-after.
I'll lay my head on your chest
as I put you to the test.
Spoonfeed your ego's ear
with sweet nothingness
and whisper you're the best
cause it looks like you're the type
who believe in hype
of the damsel in distress.

If I give you my number
will you kiss me out of slumber?
If I shed a tear or two
will you speed it to my rescue?

So bring on your shining armour, dude.
I'm your damsel in distress with attitude.