

Pen to Paper

I offer poetry sessions for primary and secondary schools. These involve whole class, group and individual work, and exercise core skills: reading, discussion, note-taking, writing and presenting. I work with all levels, from P1 to S6. All sessions link to the Curriculum for Excellence literacy strand; many can be linked with other CfE strands, especially Social Studies and Expressive Arts.



Projects in 2010 included **Tales of the City**, writing about local neighbourhoods with Edinburgh secondaries, and **Ghosts of War**, workshops at the Scottish National War Museum, Edinburgh, using artefacts as a stimulus for writing (both with the Scottish Poetry Library) – **Hidden in Hilton**, poems for the ‘wild wood’, a garden / woodland area at a Newcastle primary school (with Studio Alec Finlay) – **Robert Tannahill**, working with three Renfrewshire primary schools to mark the bicentenary of the poet’s death – **An Lanntair**, workshops with primary schools on Lewis and Harris around an Ian Hamilton Finlay exhibition.

I’ve outlined some sessions overleaf, but I’m happy to devise workshops on other topics. Please get in touch for further details regarding topics, availability and costs. Sessions may be eligible for financial support from Scottish Book Trust’s Live Literature Scheme. See ‘Author Search’ and ‘Live Literature Funding’ at www.scottishbooktrust.com

Biography

I was Assistant Director and Fieldworker at the Scottish Poetry Library from 1996 to 2004. Since then I’ve worked freelance as a poet, translator, editor and writing tutor. I’ve led pupil workshops and CPD sessions for, amongst others, Angus Council, Historic Scotland, Wigtown Book Festival, and many individual schools. I’ve also written online teachers’ resources, most recently for National Poetry Day 2010. My books of poems and translations include *Souvenirs and Homelands* (1998), *On the flyleaf* and *Feathers & Lime* (both 2007).



“My favourite part was when we got to write our poems. I have been inspired and now want to be a poet when I leave school.” – “I liked writing the poems and was annoyed when you told us to stop.” – P6 pupils

“...an absolute delight having a poetry workshop with you again... you have proven to be as adept and effective with our year 6s as you had been with our year 7s and 8s in the past.”
Teacher, Scottish National War Museum session

“A very enjoyable session with many user-friendly ideas for all age groups with lots of possibilities for extension.”
Teacher, CPD session

“Feedback from the event was very positive, with students and teachers commenting that they found the session educational and fun.”
University of Aberdeen, Amelia Laws session

there & then, here & now

poetry sessions for schools



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there & then writing about the past

Primary topics

When visiting primary schools, I'm often asked to link sessions with class topics. I've covered **Ancient Egypt – Vikings – Mary, Queen of Scots – World War Two: The Home Front** – in each case using poems written at or about the period as starting points for reflective and imaginative writing.



For 2011 I'd like to develop two sessions focussing on the First and Second World Wars, for secondary school pupils taking English and/or History:

Patriotism, Privations & Peace

Amelia Laws (1886–1978) was a Scot who worked as a nurse-masseuse during the First World War. Letters written to her parents from Austria, Italy and France give a vivid first-hand account of the horrors and new circumstances war creates. Using historical knowledge and personal imagination, pupils develop characters Laws mentions, from anxious peasant farmers to feuding hospital managers.

“Not in sorrow, but in wonder”

2011 is the centenary of Czeslaw Milosz, winner of the 1980 Nobel Prize for Literature. Milosz survived the Second World War in Warsaw, and witnessed its destruction by the Nazis. His later poetry is permeated by this experience, and asks, how do we deal with loss in the midst of burgeoning life? I plan to run sessions using Milosz poems to encourage pupils to connect their own experience with world events.

Poems

late summer morning
by Blacksmith Bay
geese peck on the soft ground

LOBBED KEEPER SCREAMS

Piercing the Moonlit Waters
Lunar Bow

shAred aChievements scAtter seeDs ripEning aMong You

A shivering twig and a shiny key (3)

Poems by school pupils written in workshops I've run have been published in (or at)

wide waves small circle – Poems by schoolchildren on Lewis and Harris written in response to the exhibition IAN HAMILTON FINLAY: SAILING DINGHY (2011)

poet makar bàrd 2004-2008 – poems by young people written in Scottish Poetry Library workshops (2009)

Write On! – new writing and visual art by young people in Aberdeenshire (2006)

www.alecfinlay.com/page4.html

see 'Nine Colours' and 'Mesostic Curriculum'.

The poems above were written as part of the following projects: Langass Woodland, North Uist; Write On!, Aberdeenshire (second and third poems); Mesostic Curriculum, Milton Keynes Academy; Hidden in Hilton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

here & now writing about the present

Both types of session below can be presented for primary- and secondary-level pupils.

Outside

Working with pupils outside the classroom can be a great stimulus for writing. This might be a walk around the school, guiding pupils to look at, listen to, and even smell their everyday ground – followed by a writing session also drawing on pupils' memories and associations to create a collective portrait of the locale. Or we might go further afield to a park, beach, or woodland, consolidating and extending pupils' knowledge of the natural world. In 2010 I ran sessions on beaches in Lewis and Harris – in the 'wild wood' at Hilton Primary School, Newcastle-upon-Tyne – and at Langass Woodland on North Uist.



Formally

Poems make patterns with words. The most obvious pattern is rhyme, one of sound, but there are many other simple patterns, to do with numbers and letters. Some I enjoy are: **haiku**, a three-line poem about nature, place and the seasons – **football haiku**, a three-word poem related to headlines and slogans – **one-word poem**, with its title (of any length) commenting on the single word of the poem – **mesostic**, essentially a one-line poem in which letters combine to show its subject – **embedded poem**, in which, like some crossword clues, a word is hidden. (You can read examples of these forms under 'Poems'.)

Photos by Ken Cockburn, except Shells photo and photo of Ken by Jon Macleod