

CHELTENHAM FESTIVAL

OF PERFORMING ARTS

2021

SET POEMS

FOR VERSE SPEAKING CLASSES

Competitors in the following classes are requested to speak

EITHER the test piece (as published)

or

to choose a poem on the given theme,

offering a literary and performance challenge commensurate with the test piece

SD01

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 2 AND UNDER

'TOES' BY JUDITH NICHOLLS

OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'BEING ME'

TIME LIMIT: ONE MINUTE

Toes

Toes,
handy to wiggle,
useful to kick;
fun to tickle,
hard to lick!
Good to count on,
walk on, run –
feet without toes
would be much less fun!
To me it's quite clear
there is nothing as neat
as a fine set of toes
on the end of your feet!

Judith Nichols

SD02

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 3

'ZEBRA QUESTION' BY SHEL SILVERSTEIN

OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'QUESTIONS'

TIME LIMIT: TWO MINUTES

Zebra Question

I asked the zebra
Are you black with white stripes?
Or white with black stripes?
And the zebra asked me,
Or you good with bad habits?
Or are you bad with good habits?
Are you noisy with quiet times?
Or are you quiet with noisy times?
Are you happy with some sad days?
Or are you sad with some happy days?
Are you neat with some sloppy ways?
Or are you sloppy with some neat ways?
And on and on and on and on
And on and on he went.
I'll never ask a zebra
About stripes
Again.

Shel Silverstein

SD03

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 4

'DISTRACTED, THE MOTHER SAID TO HER BOY' BY GREGORY HARRISON

OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'SCHOOL'

TIME LIMIT: TWO MINUTES

Distracted, the Mother Said to Her Boy

Distracted, the mother said to her boy,
"Do you try to upset and perplex and annoy?
Now, give me four reasons - and don't play the fool -
Why you shouldn't get up and get ready for school."

Her son replied slowly, "Well, mother, you see,
I can't stand the teachers and they detest me;
And there isn't a boy or a girl in the place
That I like or, in turn, that delights in my face."

"And I'll give you two reasons," she said, "why you ought
Get yourself off to school before you get caught;
Because, first, you are forty, and, next, you young fool,
It's your job to be there.
You're the head of the school."

Gregory Harrison

SD04

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 5

'SEA FEVER' BY JOHN MASEFIELD

OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'WEATHER'

TIME LIMIT: TWO MINUTES

Sea Fever

I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea's face, and a grey dawn breaking,

I must down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea-gulls crying.

I must down to the seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way where the wind's like a whetted knife;
And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover,
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over.

John Masefield

SD05

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 6

'SILVER' BY WALTER DE LA MARE

OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'NIGHT'

TIME LIMIT: TWO MINUTES

Silver

Slowly, silently, now the moon
Walks the night in her silver shoon;
This way, and that, she peers, and sees
Silver fruit upon silver trees;
One by one the casements catch
Her beams beneath the silvery thatch;
Couched in his kennel, like a log,
With paws of silver sleeps the dog;
From their shadowy cote the white breasts peep
Of doves in a silver-feathered sleep;
A harvest mouse goes scampering by,
With silver claws and a silver eye;
And moveless fish in the water gleam,
By silver reeds in a silver stream.

Walter de la Mare

SD06

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 7

'THE BRITISH' BY BENJAMIN ZEPHANIAH

OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'IDENTITY'

TIME LIMIT: THREE MINUTES

The British

Take some Picts, Celts and Silures
And let them settle,
Then overrun them with Roman conquerors.

Remove the Romans after approximately 400 years
Add lots of Norman French to some
Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Vikings, then stir vigorously.

Mix some hot Chileans, cool Jamaicans, Dominicans,
Trinidadians and Bajans with some Ethiopians, Chinese,
Vietnamese and Sudanese.

Then take a blend of Somalians, Sri Lankans, Nigerians
And Pakistanis,
Combine with some Guyanese
And turn up the heat.

Sprinkle some fresh Indians, Malaysians, Bosnians,
Iraqis and Bangladeshis together with some
Afghans, Spanish, Turkish, Kurdish, Japanese
And Palestinians
Then add to the melting pot.

Leave the ingredients to simmer.

As they mix and blend allow their languages to flourish
Binding them together with English.

Allow time to be cool.

Add some unity, understanding, and respect for the future,
Serve with justice
And enjoy.

Note: All the ingredients are equally important. Treating one ingredient better than another will leave a bitter unpleasant taste.

Warning: An unequal spread of justice will damage the people and cause pain. Give justice and equality to all.

Benjamin Zephaniah

SD07

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 8

'TARANTELLA' BY HILAIRE BELLOC

OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'TRAVEL'

TIME LIMIT: THREE MINUTES

Tarantella

Do you remember an Inn, Miranda?
Do you remember an Inn?
And the tedding and the spreading of the straw for a bedding,
And the fleas that tease in the High Pyrenees,
And the wine that tasted of tar,
And the cheers and the jeers of the young muleteers
Under the vine of the dark veranda?
Do you remember an Inn, Miranda?
Do you remember an Inn?
And the cheers and the jeers of the young muleteers
Who hadn't got a penny,
And who weren't paying any,
And the hammer at the doors and the din;
And the Hip! Hop! Hap!
Of the clap
Of the hands to the twirl and the swirl
Of the girl gone chancing,
Glancing,
Dancing,
Backing and advancing,
Snapping of the clapper to the spin,
Out and in
And the Ting! Tong! Tang! of the guitar?
Do you remember an Inn, Miranda?
Do you remember an Inn?

Never more;
Miranda,
Never more.
Only the high peaks hoar:
And Aragon a torrent at the door.
No sound
In the walls of the Halls where falls
The tread
Of the feet of the dead to the ground
No sound:
But the boom
Of the far Waterfall like Doom.

Hilaire Belloc

SD08

VERSE SPEAKING YEARS 9 & 10

'LET THERE BE PEACE' BY LEMM SISSAY

OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'CONFLICT'

TIME LIMIT: THREE MINUTES

Let There Be Peace

Let there be peace
So frowns fly away like albatross
And skeletons foxtrot from cupboards,
So war correspondents become travel show presenters
And magpies bring back lost property,
Children, engagement rings, broken things.

Let there be peace
So storms can go out to sea to be
Angry and return to me calm,
So the broken can rise up and dance in the hospitals.
Let the aged Ethiopian man in the grey block of flats
Peer through his window and see Addis before him,
So his thrilled outstretched arms become frames
For his dreams.

Let there be peace
Let tears evaporate to form clouds, cleanse themselves
And fall into reservoirs of drinking water.
Let harsh memories burst into fireworks that melt
In the dark pupils of a child's eyes
And disappear like shoals of silver darting fish,
And let the waves reach the shore with a
Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

Lemm Sissay

SD09

VERSE SPEAKING YEARS 11 – 13

‘THE WAY MY MOTHER SPEAKS’ BY CAROL ANN DUFFY

OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF ‘LOVE’

TIME LIMIT: THREE MINUTES

The Way My Mother Speaks

I say her phrases to myself
in my head
or under the shallows of my breath,
restful shapes moving.
The day and ever. The day and ever.

The train this slow evening
goes down England
browsing for the right sky,
too blue swapped for a cool grey.
For miles I have been saying
What like is it.
The way I say things when I think.
Nothing is silent. Nothing is not silent.
What like is it.

Only tonight
I am happy and sad
like a child
who stood at the end of summer
and dipped a net
in a green, erotic pond. *The day
and ever. The day and ever.*
I am homesick, free, in love
with the way my mother speaks.

Carol Ann Duffy

SD10

VERSE SPEAKING OPEN

'IN MEMORY OF MY GRANDFATHER' BY EDWARD STOREY

OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'FAMILY'

TIME LIMIT: FIVE MINUTES

In Memory of My Grandfather

Swearing about the weather he walked in
like an old tree and sat down;
his beard charred with tobacco, his voice
rough as the bard of his cracked hands.

Whenever he came it was the wrong time.
Roots spread over the hearth, tripped
whoever tried to move about the room;
the house was cramped with only furniture.

But I was glad of his coming. Only
through him could I breathe in the sun
and smell the field. His clothes reeked
of the toil and the world outside;

geese and cows were the colour he made them,
he knew the language of birds and brought them
singing out of his beard, alive
to my blanket. He was winter and harvest.

Plums shone in his eyes when he rambled
Of orchards. With giant thumbs he'd split
an apple through the core, and juice
flowed from his ripe, uncultured mouth.

Then, hearing the room clock chime,
he walked from my ceiling of farmyards
and returned to his forest of thunder;
the house regained silence and corners.

Slumped there in my summerless season
I longed for his rough hands and words
To break the restrictions of my bed,
To burst like a tree from my four walls.

But there was no chance again of miming
his habits or language. Only now,
years later in a cramped city, can I
be grateful for his influence and love.

Edward Storey