

Remember, remember: memorising poems

*'and lines of old songs...
will aye come back
once in a blue moon to us
unbidden'*

Liz Lochhead ['In the Mid-Midwinter'](#)

Poetry recitation is having a resurgence in popularity with national competitions running in the US, Ireland, Canada and England. Learning poetry by heart can divide opinion with some seeing it as an important way to know a poem and put it in your mental rucksack; others see it as a chore that can discourage potential poetry lovers. We've gathered the following links to help you to explore the subject and resources if you want to stretch the memory muscles of your class.

Why memorise poetry?

The following articles present cases for learning poetry by heart:

- The New Yorker ['Why Should We Memorise?'](#) A reflective and critically aware article; 'Memorized poems are a sort of larder, laid up against the hungers of an extended period of solitude'
- The Guardian ['How difficult is it to learn a poem by heart?'](#) A little bit difficult would seem to be the answer. Steven Moss describes his efforts to memorise.
- The Academy of American Poets ['Memorize a Poem'](#) Brief no-nonsense advice.
- The Telegraph ['Seamus Heaney: school pupils should memorise poetry by rote'](#) a short article explaining how Heaney felt memorising is an important way of developing your 'cultural ear.'
- The New York Times ['Got Poetry?'](#) Argues for the pleasure of memorising. Includes tips and suggested poems.

Which poems are good to memorise?

Poems with a strong meter and rhyme pattern provide good cues for memorising. However, freer forms can work well too. Most importantly, it should be a poem you like.

- *By Heart: 101 Poems to Remember* is predominantly classic favourites. Selected by Ted Hughes, these poems have strong visual imagery and are familiar enough that many people will recognise a few lines immediately before they even start trying to memorise.
- *Committed to Memory: 100 Best Poems to Memorise* edited by John Hollander. Includes many of the classic recital poems and some American poetry that may be unfamiliar to younger pupils.
- www.poetrybyheart.org.uk has an anthology with poems from 1000AD to 2010. Lots of choice!
- www.poets.org has a list of poems which they recommend for teachers looking for suitable poems to memorise at <http://www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/86>
- Penguin Classics have devised an app [Poems by Heart](#) to help people memorise classic poetry. I've tried it and it does work although only the first few poems are free. Thereafter there is a charge to download bundles of poems.