what goes around comes around : Writing Circle Poems

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Introduction

A circle poem is a short text which the reader can begin at more than one point, and which can be read continuously.

Circle poems are often about circles – visual, temporal, and metaphorical. Circle poems connect to ideas of sustainability and recycling.

The aim of the resource is to make pupils more aware of types of circularity in the environments around them, and in the environment more generally, and to reflect on and describe these, as well as the thoughts and feelings they evoke in us, through writing and the presentation of writing.

The activities here can be adapted for use by both primary and secondary school classes.

A session involving discussion and note-taking, showing examples of circle poems, and writing circle poems can be done in about an hour.

The circular walk can last as long as you want, depending on the route, and the amount of note-taking done while out.

Discussion and note-taking

Talk and make notes about circularity as we encounter it in our environment, for example

- Circular objects in the school, such as plates, badges, basketball hoops and so on
- Circular objects outside, such as tree trunks, street signs, race tracks
- Sun and moon, and the cycles of day and night, as well as the four seasons
- the water cycle
- clocks and watches (the old-fashioned type, not digital ones!)
- Regularly repeated activities like lessons, meals and journeys

Discuss these circles and cycles. How do these circles and cycles – and recycling – help sustain our environment?

Examples of Circle Poems

AND

A simple way to write a circle poem is to link a series of words with ‘and’.

This circle poem features one word for each of the four seasons.

wellies & blossoms & picnics & brambles

Mortlach Primary School

WHEN

You can write a circle poem about two (unrelated) things happening at the same time, using words like ‘when’, ‘while’ and ‘as’.

when the clouds are gloomy my eyes are blue

Merkinch Primary School, Inverness

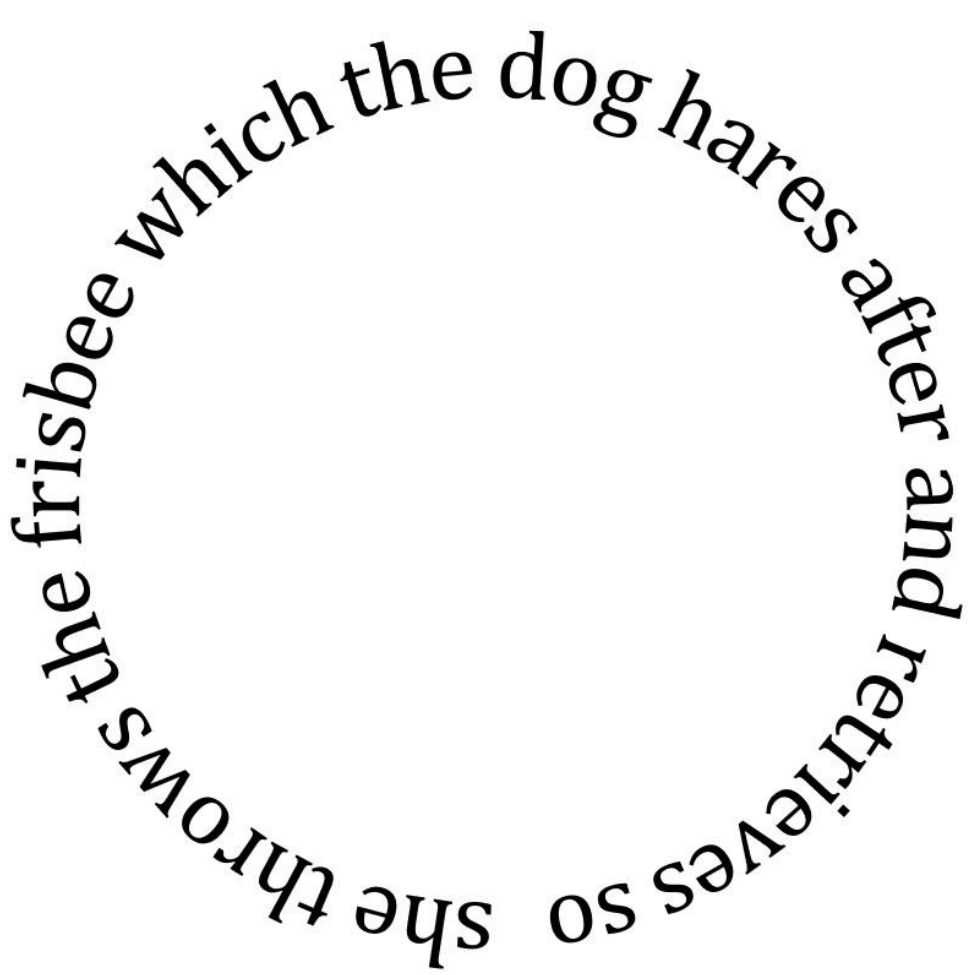
BALANCE

You can write about two opposing forces which create a balance, like this poem about where a river meets the sea.

the headwaters' pressure holds in check the tide's pressure holds in check

AGAIN, AGAIN!

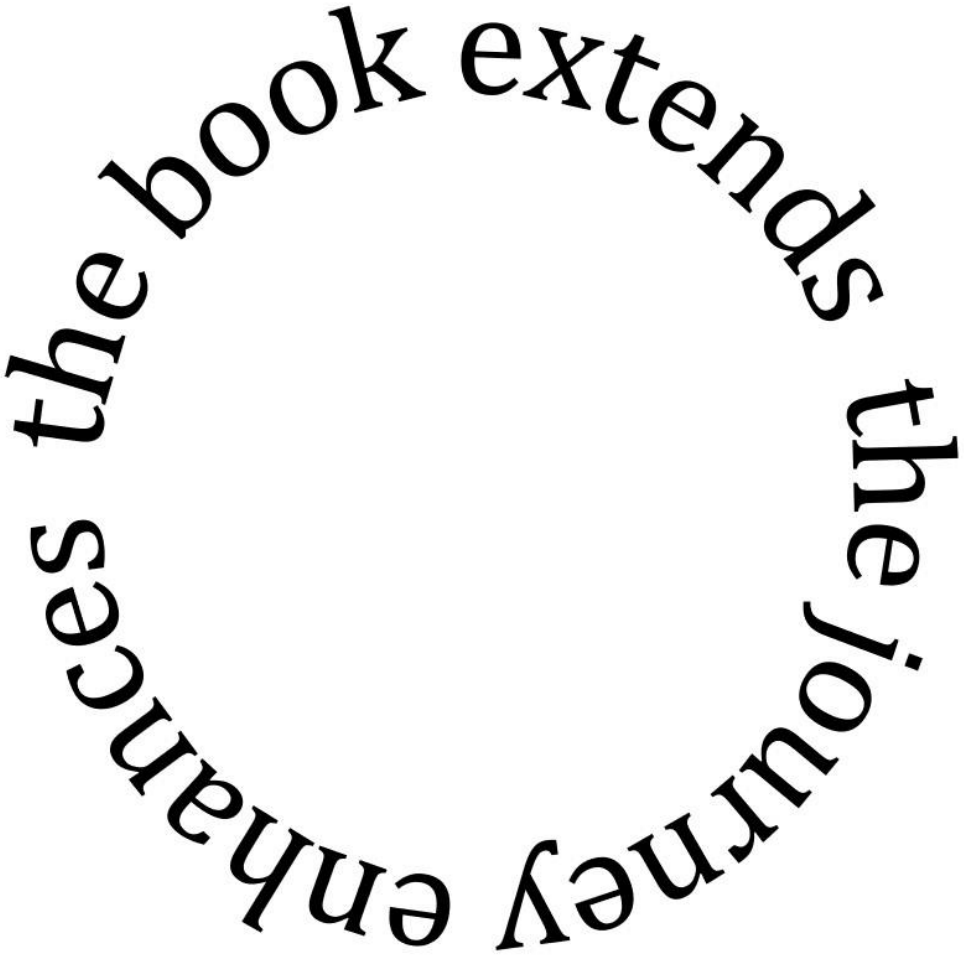
You can write about an action which is frequently repeated, like this poem about a dog who never seems to tire of chasing a frisbee.



she throws the frisbee which the dog hares after and retrieves so

SUBJECT=OBJECT

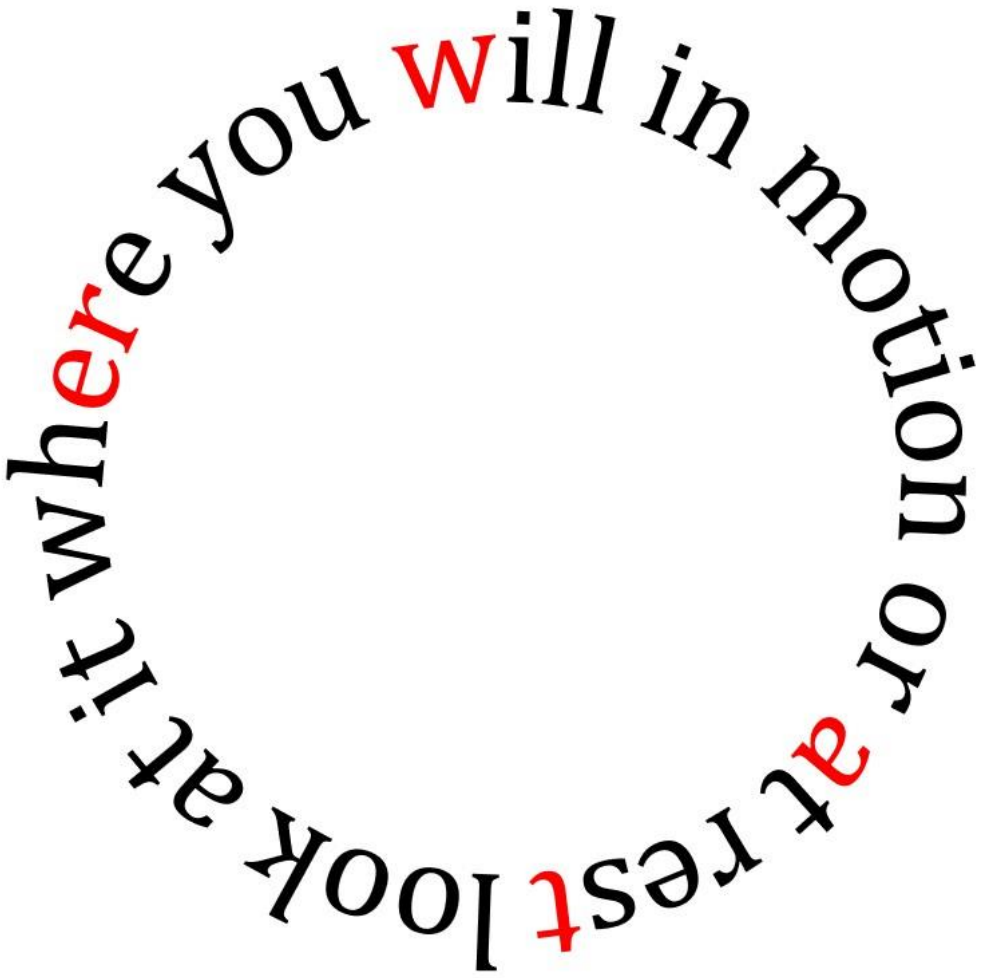
You can write a poem in which two nouns are linked by two verbs, with each noun working as both subject and object.



the book extends the journey enhances

A WORD WITHIN

You can give your poem a ‘title’ by picking out certain letters, spelling out the subject of the poem which might otherwise be unclear.



look at it wh**er**e you **w**ill in motion or **a**t res**t**

Walking in Circles

Go on a circular walk – the route doesn’t have to be exactly circular, but you should start and end at the same place, and not repeat or cross any part of the walk.

When planning the walk, try to take in a range of environments, such as busy streets, quiet streets, park, woodland, riverside, coastal path, and so on.

Take notes as you go of the circles you encounter, such

- circular objects, such as windows, manhole covers, roundabouts
- things that move in circles, such as different kinds of wheels
- objects that bring to mind ideas of circularity, such as the moon (even if it's not round when you see it), or autumn leaves evoking the changing seasons.

Stop at one or two places to look more closely at what's around you – take a 360˚ view of our surroundings, and make notes of what you can see in different directions.

At the end of the walk review your notes and share your experiences of the walk, whether

- observations
- surprises
- revelations
- memories.

<u>Writing Circle Poems</u>

Here are some simple ways to start writing your own circle poems.

i) Word-pairs

Choose one adjective and one noun. They shouldn't relate to one another.

Now pick a suitable noun for the adjective, and a suitable adjective for the noun.

These four words make up your circle poem.

ii) Two clauses

Choose two nouns – for example *school* and *street*

Write a sentence in two clauses, with one noun in each e.g.

when school ends I play on the moor

This is your circle poem.

iii) 24 hours

Write down between 2 and 6 things that happen regularly over a period of 24 hours. These could be things that you do, or things you observe in the world around you.

Find a way of linking them to create a circle poem.

You can also use any of the examples above as models or starting points for writing your own circle poems.

Presenting Circle Poems

Present the circle poem visually. It's easiest to do this by drawing a circle on a piece of paper, using a compass, a jar or a plate, and writing the poem by hand around this circle using a pen or pencil. (You can also use a computer, though how to make your text into a circle might take more working out.)

Think about

- how big the circle is
- where it is placed on the page
- whether you use lower or upper case letters
- the colour of your paper
- the colour(s) of the letters

Show and read out your circle poems in groups, and to the whole class.

Make an exhibition of circle poems on a tabletop, or on a wall.

Allow time for questions and a broader discussion of the themes raised.

Further reading

change what changes, Alec Finlay (Red Fox Press, 2007)

Quait: Circle Poems, ed. Luke Allan (2015)

turning toward living: Circle Poems, ed. Alec Finlay (platform projects, 2005)

Typoésie, ed. Jérôme Peignot (Imprimerie Nationale, 2000)

Flowers in Concrete by Mary Ellen Solt

Merkinch Circles (Inverness)

Credits

This resource was written by Ken Cockburn.

Ken is a poet based in Edinburgh, who has led circle poem workshops for adults and children across Scotland. Poems from sessions in Inverness in 2015 were carved in sandstone by Mary Bourne, and installed in the flood-wall alongside the River Ness. https://kencockburn.co.uk/

KC, 22/09/22