

CHELTENHAM FESTIVAL
OF
PERFORMING ARTS
2023

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

SDo1

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 1 AND UNDER
'I WISH I HAD A WOOKIE' BY IAN DOESCHER
OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'FRIENDS'
TIME LIMIT: ONE MINUTE

I WISH I HAD A WOOKIE

I wish I had a Wookiee
To keep the monsters out.
If nightmares came to get me
You'd hear Chewbacca shout.
If I were sad or frightened –
He'd come and comfort me.
A Wookiee is a kid's best friend
At least, they ought to be.

by Ian Doescher

SDo2

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 2
'SUNFLAKES' BY FRANK ASCH
OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'WEATHER'
TIME LIMIT: ONE MINUTE

SUNFLAKES

If sunlight fell like snowflakes,
gleaming yellow and so bright,
we could build a sunman,
we could have a sunball fight,
we could watch the sunflakes
drifting in the sky.
We could go sleighing
in the middle of July
through sundrifts and sunbanks,
we could ride a sunmobile,
and we could touch sunflakes—
I wonder how they'd feel.

by Frank Asch

SDo3

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 3
'GEOGRAPHY' BY JOHN KITCHING
OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'OUR WORLD'
TIME LIMIT: TWO MINUTES

GEOGRAPHY

I love Geography.

Other people, other places,
Different customs, different faces,
Drought and desert, field and plain,
Snow and ice and monsoon rain,
Volcanoes, glaciers,
Bubbling springs,
Clouds and rainbows,
Countless things.
Stars and planets, distant space,
Whatever's ugly, full of grace.
Seas and rivers,
Cliffs and caves,
The wondrous ways this world behaves.
So much to learn; so much to know;
And so much farther still to go.

by John Kitching

SDo4

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 4
'LIFE DOESN'T FRIGHTEN ME' BY MAYA ANGELOU
OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'BEING ME'
TIME LIMIT: TWO MINUTES

LIFE DOESN'T FRIGHTEN ME

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.

by Maya Angelou

SD05

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 5
'THE GHOST TEACHER' BY ALLAN AHLBERG
OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'SPOOKY SHENANIGANS'
TIME LIMIT: TWO MINUTES

THE GHOST TEACHER

The school is closed, the children gone,
But the ghost of a teacher lingers on.
As the daylight fades, as the daytime ends,
As the night draws in and the dark descends,
She stands in the class room, as clear as glass,
And calls the names of her absent class.

The school is shut, the children grown,
But the ghost of the teacher all alone,
Puts the date on the board and moves about
(As the night draws in and the stars come out)
Between desks -A glow in the gloom-
And calls for quite in the silent room.

The school is a ruin, the children fled,
But the ghost of the teacher, long time dead,
As the moon comes up and the first owls glide,
Puts on her coat and steps outside.
In the moonlit playground, shadow free,
She stands on duty with a cup of tea.

The school is forgotten -the children forget-
But the ghost of a teacher, lingers yet.
As the night creeps up to the edge of day,
She tidies the Plasticine away;
Counts the scissors - a shimmer of glass-
And says, "Off you go!" to her absent class.

She utters the words that no one hears.
Picks up her bag...
And
Disappears.

by Allan Ahlberg

SDo6

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 6
'CHRISTMAS THANK-YOUS' BY MICK GOWAR
OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'FAMILIES'
TIME LIMIT: TWO MINUTES

CHRISTMAS THANK YOUS

Dear Auntie -

Oh, what a nice jumper
I've always adored powder blue
and fancy you thinking of
orange and pink
for the stripes
how clever of you!

Dear Gran

Many thanks for the hankies
Now I really can't wait for the flu
and the daisies embroidered
in red round the 'M'
for Michael
how thoughtful of you!

Dear Sister

I quite understand your concern
It's a risk sending jam in the post.
But I think I've pulled out
all the big bits of glass
so it won't taste too sharp
spread on toast.

Dear Uncle

The soap is terrific!
So useful and such a kind thought.
And how did you guess that
I'd just used the last of
the soap
that last Christmas you bought?

Dear Cousin

What socks!
And the same sort you wear,
so you must be the last word in style.
And I'm certain you're right
that the luminous green
WILL make me stand out a mile.

Dear Grandad

Don't fret
I'm delighted
so don't think your gift will offend.
I'm not at all hurt
that you gave up this year
and just sent me a fiver to spend.

by Mick Gowar

SDo7

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 7
'THOSE WINTER SUNDAYS' BY ROBERT HAYDEN
OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'LOVE'
TIME LIMIT: THREE MINUTES

THOSE WINTER SUNDAYS

Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.
What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely offices?

by Robert Hayden

SDo8

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 8

'IN MEMORY OF ANYONE UNKNOWN TO ME' BY ELIZABETH JENNINGS
OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'LOSS'

TIME LIMIT: THREE MINUTES

IN MEMORY OF ANYONE UNKNOWN TO ME

At this particular time I have no one
Particular person to grieve for, though there must
Be many, many unknown ones going to dust
Slowly, not remembered for what they have done
Or left undone. For these, then, I will grieve
Being impartial, unable to deceive.

How they lived, or died, is quite unknown,
And, by that fact gives my grief purity--
An important person quite apart from me
Or one obscure who drifted down alone.
Both or all I remember, have a place.
For these I never encountered face to face.

Sentiment will creep in. I cast it out
Wishing to give these classical repose,
No epitaph, no poppy and no rose
From me, and certainly no wish to learn about
The way they lived or died. In earth or fire
They are gone. Simply because they were human, I admire

by Elizabeth Jennings

SDo9

VERSE SPEAKING YEARS 9 & 10
'WAR PHOTOGRAPHER' BY CAROL ANN DUFFY
OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'CONFLICT'
TIME LIMIT: THREE MINUTES

WAR PHOTOGRAPHER

In his dark room he is finally alone
with spools of suffering set out in ordered rows.
The only light is red and softly glows,
as though this were a church and he
a priest preparing to intone a Mass.
Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh. All flesh is grass.

He has a job to do. Solutions slop in trays
beneath his hands, which did not tremble then
though seem to now. Rural England. Home again
to ordinary pain which simple weather can dispel,
to fields which don't explode beneath the feet
of running children in a nightmare heat.

Something is happening. A stranger's features
faintly start to twist before his eyes,
a half-formed ghost. He remembers the cries
of this man's wife, how he sought approval
without words to do what someone must
and how the blood stained into foreign dust.

A hundred agonies in black and white
from which his editor will pick out five or six
for Sunday's supplement. The reader's eyeballs prick
with tears between the bath and pre-lunch beers.
From the aeroplane he stares impassively at where
he earns his living and they do not care.

by Carol Ann Duffy

SD10

VERSE SPEAKING YEARS 11 - 13
'ADULT FICTION' BY IAN MCMILLAN
OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'MEMORIES'
TIME LIMIT: THREE MINUTES

ADULT FICTION

I always loved libraries, the quiet of them,
The smell of the plastic covers and the paper
And the tables and the silence of them,
The silence of them that if you listened wasn't silence,
It was the murmur of stories held for years on shelves
And the soft clicking of the date stamp,
The soft clickety-clicking of the date stamp.

I used to go down to our little library on a Friday night
In late summer, just as autumn was thinking about
Turning up, and the light outside would be the colour
Of an Everyman cover and the lights in the library
Would be soft as anything, and I'd sit at a table
And flick through a book and fall in love
With the turning of the leaves, the turning of the leaves.

And then at seven o'clock Mrs Dove would say
In a voice that wasn't too loud so it wouldn't
Disturb the books "Seven o'clock please ..."
And as I was the only one in the library's late summer rooms
I would be the only one to stand up and close my book
And put it back on the shelf with a sound like a kiss,
Back on the shelf with a sound like a kiss.

And I'd go out of the library and Mrs Dove would stand
For a moment silhouetted by the Adult Fiction,
And then she would turn the light off and lock the door
And go to her little car and drive off into the night
That was slowly turning the colour of ink and I would stand
For two minutes and then I'd walk over to the dark library
And just stand in front of the dark library.

by Ian McMillan

SD11

VERSE SPEAKING OPEN
'WILD GEESE' BY MARY OLIVER
OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'BEING'
TIME LIMIT: THREE MINUTES

WILD GEESE

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

by Mary Oliver