

# CHELTENHAM FESTIVAL OF PERFORMING ARTS 2026

## **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 1 AND UNDER**

**"MY FACE SAYS IT ALL!" BY PHILIP WADDELL**

**OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'BEING NAUGHTY'**

**TIME LIMIT: ONE MINUTE**

### **MY FACE SAYS IT ALL!**

When I've made mischief  
Or my tale's been tall,  
My mum always knows  
Cos my face says it all.  
Well... that's what my mum says  
Then I'm in disgrace,  
I wish I could learn  
How to silence my face!

*Philip Waddell*

## **SD02**

**VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 2**

**“LISTEN AND LOOK” by PATRICIA LEIGHTON**

**OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF ‘MAGICAL MOMENTS’**

**TIME LIMIT: ONE MINUTE**

### **LISTEN AND LOOK**

Winds whistle,  
waves whisper  
stories on the shore;  
tales of treasure,  
men and mermaids,  
galleons and gore.

Night comes;  
in the moonlight sands  
are silver strands,  
dream ways,  
gleam ways  
washed by magic hands.

See the sparkle,  
hear the stories,  
hold them in your head.  
Memories are more  
than moments,  
words are more  
than letters read.

*Patricia Leighton*

## **SD03**

**VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 3**

**"MAGIC CAT" BY PETER DIXON**

**OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'ANIMALS'**

**TIME LIMIT: TWO MINUTES**

### **MAGIC CAT**

My mum whilst walking through the door  
spilt some magic on the floor.  
Blobs of this and splotches of that  
but most of it upon the cat.

Our cat turned magic, straight away  
and in the garden went to play  
where it grew two massive wings  
and flew around in fancy rings.

"Oh look!" cried Mother, pointing high,  
"I didn't know our cat could fly."  
Then with a dash of Tibby's tail  
she turned my mum into a snail!

So now she lives beneath a stone  
and dusts around a different home.  
And I'm an ant, and Dad's a mouse  
And Tibby's living in our house!

*Peter Dixon*

## **SD04**

**VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 4**

**“DEAR MUM” BY BRIAN PATTEN**

**OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF ‘ACCIDENTS AND MISHAPS’**

**TIME LIMIT: TWO MINUTES**

### **DEAR MUM**

Dear Mum,  
While you were out  
A cup went and broke itself,  
A crack appeared in the blue vase  
Your great-great grandad  
Brought back from Mr Ming in China.  
Somehow, without me even turning on the tap,  
The sink mysteriously overflowed.  
A strange jam-stain,  
About the size of a boy's hand,  
Appeared on the kitchen wall.  
I don't think we will ever discover  
Exactly how the cat  
Managed to turn on the washing-machine  
(especially from the inside),  
or how Sis's pet rabbit went and mistook  
the waste-disposal unit for a burrow.  
I can tell you I was scared when,  
As if by magic,  
A series of muddy footprints  
Appeared on the new white carpet.  
I was being good  
(honest)  
but I think the house is haunted so,  
knowing you're going to have a fit,  
I've gone over to Gran's for a bit.

*Brian Patten*

## **SD05**

**VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 5**

**“WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS” BY SHEL SILVERSTEIN  
OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF ‘OUR WORLD’**

**TIME LIMIT: TWO MINUTES**

### **WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS**

There is a place where the sidewalk ends  
and before the street begins,  
and there the grass grows soft and white,  
and there the sun burns crimson bright,  
and there the moon-bird rests from his flight  
to cool in the peppermint wind

Let us leave this place where the smoke blows black  
and the dark street winds and bends.

Past the pits where the asphalt flowers grow  
we shall walk with a walk that is measured and slow  
and watch where the chalk-white arrows go  
to the place where the sidewalk ends.

Yes we'll walk with a walk that is measured and slow,  
and we'll go where the chalk-white arrows go,  
for the children, they mark, and the children, they know,  
the place where the sidewalk ends.

*Shel Silverstein*

## **SD06**

**VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 6**

**"THE VISITOR" BY IAN SERRAILLIER**

**OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'SPOOKY SHENANIGANS'**

**TIME LIMIT: TWO MINUTES**

### **THE VISITOR**

A crumbling churchyard, the sea and the moon;  
The waves had gouged out grave and bone;  
A man was walking, late and alone...

He saw a skeleton on the ground;  
A ring on a bony finger he found.

He ran home to his wife and gave her the ring.  
"Oh, where did you get it?" He said not a thing.

"It's the loveliest ring in the world," she said,  
As it glowed on her finger. They slipped off to bed.

At midnight they woke. In the dark outside,  
"Give me my ring!" a chill voice cried.

"What was that, William? What did it say?"  
"Don't worry, my dear. It'll soon go away."

"I'm coming!" A skeleton opened the door.  
"Give me my ring!" It was crossing the floor.

"What was that, William? What did it say?"  
"Don't worry, my dear. It'll soon go away."

"I'm reaching you now! I'm climbing the bed."  
The wife pulled the sheet right over her head.

It was torn from her grasp and tossed in the air:  
"I'll drag you out of bed by the hair!"

"What was that, William? What did it say?"  
"Throw the ring through the window! THROW IT AWAY!"

She threw it. The skeleton leapt from the sill,  
Scooped up the ring and clattered downhill,  
Fainter... and fainter... Then all was still

*Ian Serrailier*

## **SD07**

**VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 7**

**"THE DISAPPOINTED" BY ELLA WHEELER WILCOX**

**OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'IMPERFECTIONS'**

**TIME LIMIT: THREE MINUTES**

### **THE DISAPPOINTED**

There are songs enough for the hero  
Who dwells on the heights of fame;  
I sing for the disappointed—  
For those who have missed their aim.

I sing with a tearful cadence  
For one who stands in the dark,  
And knows that his last best arrow  
Has bounded back from the mark.

I sing for the breathless runner,  
The eager, anxious soul,  
Who falls with his strength exhausted,  
Almost in sight of the goal.

For the hearts that break in silence,  
With a sorrow all unknown;  
For those who need companions,  
Yet walk their way alone.

There are songs enough for the lovers,  
Who share life's tender pain;  
I sing for the one whose passion  
Is given all in vain.

For those whose spirit-comrades  
Have missed them on the way;  
I sing, with a heart o'erflowing,  
This minor strain to-day.

And I know the solar system  
Must somewhere keep in space  
A prize for that spent runner  
Who barely lost the race.

For the plan would be imperfect  
Unless it held some sphere  
That paid for the toil and talent  
And love that are wasted here.

*Ella Wheeler Wilcox*



## **SD08**

### **VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 8**

#### **"THE TROUBLE WITH SNOWMEN" BY ROGER MCGOUGH OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'FAMILY'**

**TIME LIMIT: THREE MINUTES**

## **THE TROUBLE WITH SNOWMEN**

The trouble with snowmen,'  
Said my father one year  
'They are no sooner made  
than they just disappear.

I'll build you a snowman  
And I'll build it to last  
Add sand and cement  
And then have it cast.

And so every winter,'  
He went on to explain  
'You shall have a snowman  
Be it sunshine or rain.'

And that snowman still stands  
Though my father is gone  
Out there in the garden  
Like an unmarked gravestone.

Staring up at the house  
Gross and misshapen  
As if waiting for something  
Bad to happen.

For as the years pass  
And I grow older  
When summers seem short  
And winters colder.

The snowmen I envy  
As I watch children play  
Are the ones that are made  
And then fade away.

*Roger McGough*

## SD09

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 9 & 10

“TULA: BOOKS ARE DOOR-SHAPED” BY MARGARITA ENGLE  
OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF ‘LIBERATION’

TIME LIMIT: THREE MINUTES

### TULA: BOOKS ARE DOOR-SHAPED

Books are door-shaped  
portals  
carrying me  
across oceans  
and centuries,  
helping me feel  
less alone.

But my mother believes  
that girls who read too much  
are unladylike  
and ugly,  
so my father's books are locked  
in a clear glass cabinet. I gaze  
at enticing covers  
and mysterious titles,  
but I am rarely permitted  
to touch  
the enchantment  
of words.

Poems.  
Stories.  
Plays.  
All are forbidden.  
Girls are not supposed to think,  
but as soon as my eager mind  
begins to race, free thoughts

rush in  
to replace  
the trapped ones.

I imagine distant times  
and faraway places.  
Ghosts.  
Vampires.

Ancient warriors.  
Fantasy moves into  
the tangled maze  
of lonely confusion.

Secretly, I open  
an invisible book in my mind,  
and I step  
through its magical door-shape  
into a universe  
of dangerous villains  
and breathtaking heroes.

Many of the heroes are men  
and boys, but some are girls  
so tall  
strong  
and clever  
that they rescue other children  
from monsters.

*by Margarita Engle*

## **SD10**

**VERSE SPEAKING YEARS 11 - 13**

**"LIKE AN HEIRESS" BY GRACE NICHOLS**

**OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'LEGACY'**

**TIME LIMIT: THREE MINUTES**

### **LIKE AN HEIRESS**

Like an heiress, drawn to the light of her  
eye-catching jewels, Atlantic draws me  
to the mirror of my oceanic small-days.  
But the beach is deserted except for a lone  
wave of rubbish against the seawall -  
used car tyres, plastic bottles, styrofoam cups  
rightly tossed back by an ocean's moodswings.  
Undisturbed, not even by a sea bird,  
I stand under the sun's burning treasury  
gazing out at the far-out gleam of Atlantic  
before heading back like a tourist  
to the sanctuary of my hotel room  
to dwell in the air-conditioned coolness  
on the quickening years and fate of our planet.

*by Grace Nichols*

## **SD10**

**VERSE SPEAKING YEARS OPEN**

**EITHER**

**“IN FLANDERS FIELDS” BY JOHN MACRAE**

**OR**

**“ANTHEM FOR DOOMED YOUTH” BY WILFRED OWEN**

### **IN FLANDERS FIELDS**

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie,  
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

*by John Macrae*

## **ANTHEM FOR DOOMED YOUTH**

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?  
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.  
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle  
Can patter out their hasty orisons.  
No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;  
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,  
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;  
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?  
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes  
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.  
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;  
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,  
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

*by Wilfred Owen*