

# CHELTENHAM FESTIVAL

OF

## PERFORMING ARTS

2027

### 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  
'HALLOWE'EN' BY ROGER STEVENS  
OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'FESTIVALS'  
TIME LIMIT: ONE MINUTE**

## **HALLOWE'EN**

Darren's got a pumpkin  
Hollowed out a treat  
He put it in the window  
It scared half the street.

I wish I had a pumpkin  
But I've not and it's a shame  
I've got a scary carrot  
But it's not the same

*by Roger Stevens*

# **SDo2**

**VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 2**

**'P.E. RACE' BY CORAL RUMBLE**

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

**TIME LIMIT: ONE MINUTE**

## **P.E. RACE**

The P.E. race has started  
And clothes fly in the air,  
In the hurry to get ready  
Things land everywhere...  
One shirt upon the bench,  
Two socks upon the sink,  
Three vests upon the floor –  
One white, one blue, one pink.  
Four skirts upon a broom,  
Five jumpers on one peg,  
Six pairs of shorts upon a chair,  
A shoe on teacher's head...  
The P.E. race has started  
And clothes fly in the air,  
In the hurry to get ready  
Things land everywhere.

*by Coral Rumble*

# SDo3

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 3

‘CATS’ BY ELEANOR FARJEON

OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF ‘SLEEPING’

TIME LIMIT: TWO MINUTES

## CATS

Cats sleep  
Anywhere,  
Any table,  
Any chair,  
Top of piano,  
Window-ledge,  
In the middle,  
On the edge,  
Open drawer,  
Empty shoe,  
Anybody's  
Lap will do,  
Fitted in a  
Cardboard box,  
In the cupboard  
With your frocks –  
Anywhere!  
They don't care!  
Cats sleep  
Anywhere.

*by Eleanor Farjeon*

# SDo4

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 4

'MY DAD' BY PETER DIXON

OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'PARENTS'

TIME LIMIT: TWO MINUTES

## MY DAD

My Dad

My dad's not a teacher,  
a ghost or a ghoul,  
he isn't a spaceman,  
a jester or fool.

He doesn't walk tightropes  
or dance on hot coals,  
play for United  
or score lots of goals.

He isn't a rock star,  
a wizard or king,  
he isn't a builder  
and he can't really sing.

He doesn't do time walks  
or cook on TV,  
write silly poems  
or make cups of tea.

My dad isn't wealthy,  
he's not strong or wild,  
but my dad is special  
and I am his child.

*by Peter Dixon*

# SDo5

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 5

**'MY MUM'S PUT ME ON THE TRANSFER LIST' BY DAVID HARMER  
OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'SPORT OR GAMES'**

**TIME LIMIT: TWO MINUTES**

*\*if the speaker would like to replace him/his with she/her this is acceptable as it does not alter the spirit or scansion of the poem*

## MY MUM'S PUT ME ON THE TRANSFER LIST

On Offer:

one nippy striker, ten years old  
has scored seven goals this season  
has nifty footwork and a big smile  
knows how to dive in the penalty box  
can get filthy and muddy within two minutes  
guaranteed to wreck his kit each week  
this is a FREE TRANSFER  
but he comes with running expenses  
weeks of washing shirts and shorts  
socks and vests, a pair of trainers  
needs to scoff huge amounts  
of chips and burgers, beans and apples  
pop and cola, crisps and oranges  
endless packets of chewing gum.  
This offer open until the end of the season  
I'll have him back then  
at least until the cricket starts.  
Any takers?

*by David Harmer*

# **SDo6**

**VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 6**

**'THE MONSTER UNDER YOUR BED' BY CLARE BEVAN**

**OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'MONSTERS OR MYTHOLOGY'**

**TIME LIMIT: TWO MINUTES**

## **THE MONSTER UNDER YOUR BED**

Don't shout at the monster  
Under your bed –

It's terribly lonely,  
It's never been fed,  
It can't fool around,  
And it can't make a noise,  
Its friends are the beetles  
And old, broken toys.  
It sleeps in a tangle  
Of tissues and socks,  
Its voice is as soft  
As the ticking of clocks,  
It's not like the monsters  
Who lurk in your dreams,  
It's frightened of footsteps,  
And slippers, and screams.  
It's tiny and timid,  
It's green, pink and blue,  
It's under your bed, and...

It's hiding from YOU!

*by Clare Bevan*

# SDo7

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 7  
'EMOTY HOUSE' BY GARETH OWEN  
OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'FEAR'  
TIME LIMIT: THREE MINUTES

## EMPTY HOUSE

I hate our house when there's no one in  
I miss my family and I miss the din.  
The rooms and the hallway seem cold and bare  
And the silence hangs like dust in the air.  
What's that sound upstairs that makes me start  
Driving Fear like an icicle through my heart?  
I'm imagining things, there's nobody there –  
But I have to make sure so I creep up the stair  
I stand holding my breath by the bedroom door  
And hear something rustling across the floor.  
Then a scratching sound, a tiny cry!  
I can't seem to breathe, my throat is dry.  
In the silence I hear my own heart beating  
And the rumble of water in the central heating.  
I should go in but I just don't dare  
So I call aloud, 'Is anyone there?'  
Nobody answers. I push open the door.  
A fluttering shadow crosses the floor.  
And now I see him, now understand  
And I gather him gently in my hands.  
'I won't hurt you, my friend.  
Don't flutter, don't start.'  
But his body beats wild like a feathered heart.  
Out through the window, watch him wheel and fly  
Carrying my fear across the sky.

*by Gareth Owen*



# SDo8

VERSE SPEAKING YEAR 8

‘IF’ BY RUDYARD KIPLING

OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF ‘GETTING OLDER’

TIME LIMIT: THREE MINUTES

## IF

If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,  
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
But make allowance for their doubting too;  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
Or being lied about, don’t deal in lies,  
Or being hated, don’t give way to hating,  
And yet don’t look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;  
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;  
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
And treat those two impostors just the same;  
If you can bear to hear the truth you’ve spoken  
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,  
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,  
And stoop and build ’em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
And lose, and start again at your beginnings  
And never breathe a word about your loss;  
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
And so hold on when there is nothing in you  
Except the Will which says to them: ‘Hold on!’

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,  
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
If all men count with you, but none too much;  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds’ worth of distance run,  
Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it,  
And—which is more—you’ll be a Man, my son!

*by Rudyard Kipling*

# SDo9

VERSE SPEAKING YEARS 9 & 10

‘THE LISTENERS’ BY WALTER DE LA MARE

OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF ‘THE UNKNOWN’

TIME LIMIT: THREE MINUTES

## THE LISTENERS

‘Is there anybody there?’ said the Traveller,  
Knocking on the moonlit door;  
And his horse in the silence champed the grasses  
Of the forest’s ferny floor:  
And a bird flew up out of the turret,  
Above the Traveller’s head:  
And he smote upon the door again a second time;  
‘Is there anybody there?’ he said.  
But no one descended to the Traveller;  
No head from the leaf-fringed sill  
Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,  
Where he stood perplexed and still.  
But only a host of phantom listeners  
That dwelt in the lone house then  
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight  
To that voice from the world of men:  
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,  
That goes down to the empty hall,  
Hearkening in an air stirred and shaken  
By the lonely Traveller’s call.  
And he felt in his heart their strangeness,  
Their stillness answering his cry,  
While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,  
‘Neath the starred and leafy sky;  
For he suddenly smote on the door, even  
Louder, and lifted his head:—  
‘Tell them I came, and no one answered,  
That I kept my word,’ he said.  
Never the least stir made the listeners,  
Though every word he spake  
Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house  
From the one man left awake:  
Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,  
And the sound of iron on stone,  
And how the silence surged softly backward,  
When the plunging hoofs were gone.

*by Walter de la Mare*

# SD10

**VERSE SPEAKING YEARS 11 - 13**

**THE PEELING POTATO SONNET FROM 'CLEARANCES' BY SEAMUS HEANEY  
OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'LOVE'**

**TIME LIMIT: THREE MINUTES**

## (From) CLEARANCES

When all the others were away at Mass  
I was all hers as we peeled potatoes.  
They broke the silence, let fall one by one  
Like solder weeping off the soldering iron:  
Cold comforts set between us, things to share  
Gleaming in a bucket of clean water.  
And again let fall. Little pleasant splashes  
From each other's work would bring us to our senses.

So while the parish priest at her bedside  
Went hammer and tongs at the prayers for the dying  
And some were responding and some crying  
I remembered her head bent towards my head,  
Her breath in mine, our fluent dipping knives—  
Never closer the whole rest of our lives.

*by Seamus Heaney*

# SD11

VERSE SPEAKING OPEN

**'HOW TO GET ON IN SOCIETY' BY JOHN BETJEMAN  
OR ANY OTHER POEM ON THE THEME OF 'OTHER PEOPLE'  
TIME LIMIT: THREE MINUTES**

## HOW TO GET ON IN SOCIETY

Phone for the fish knives, Norman  
As cook is a little unnerved;  
You kiddies have crumpled the serviettes  
And I must have things daintily served.

Are the requisites all in the toilet?  
The frills round the cutlets can wait  
Till the girl has replenished the cruets  
And switched on the logs in the grate.

It's ever so close in the lounge dear,  
But the vestibule's comfy for tea  
And Howard is riding on horseback  
So do come and take some with me

Now here is a fork for your pastries  
And do use the couch for your feet;  
I know that I wanted to ask you-  
Is trifle sufficient for sweet?

Milk and then just as it comes dear?  
I'm afraid the preserve's full of stones;  
Beg pardon, I'm soiling the doileys  
With afternoon tea-cakes and scones.

*by John Betjeman*