



NATIONAL POETRY DAY TOOLKIT

FREEDOM

2. BEOWULF SOUND POEMS BY CHRIS MCCABE

1 HOUR, KS2 & KS3

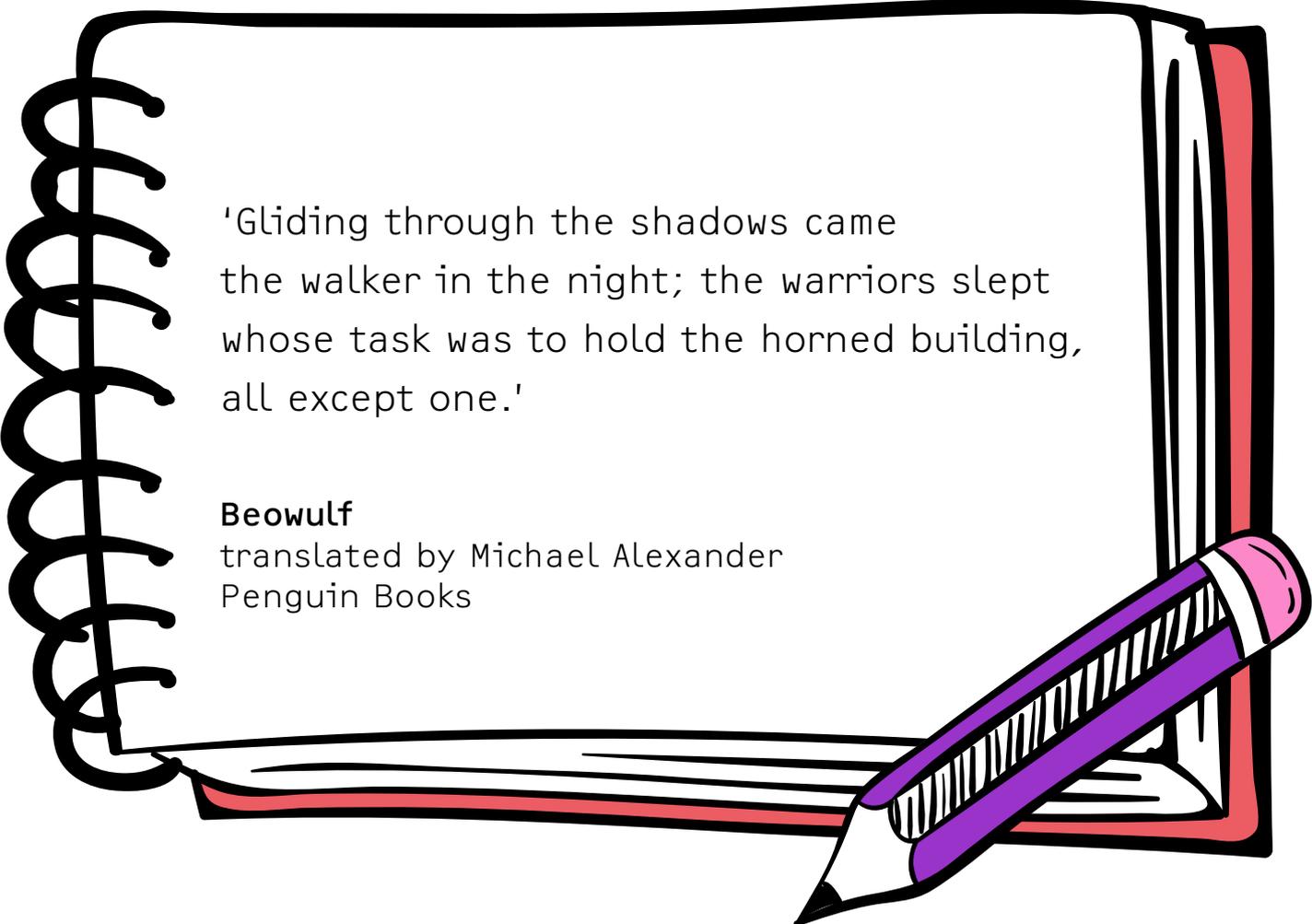
MAKING SOUND POEMS: INSPIRED BY BEOWULF.

This resource allows children to take a new approach to the epic Old English poem Beowulf through learning about the modern technique of sound poetry.

Students will write their own sound poems as well as working collaboratively with the rest of the class to bring a section of Beowulf to life.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

A short section of Beowulf to read with the class. The section is the moment where Beowulf is waiting in Hrothgar's Hall for Grendel, the monster, to arrive. Students are to imagine Beowulf there in the dark, refusing to sleep, as Grendel stalks down a mountain to return to the hall which he now thinks belongs to him.



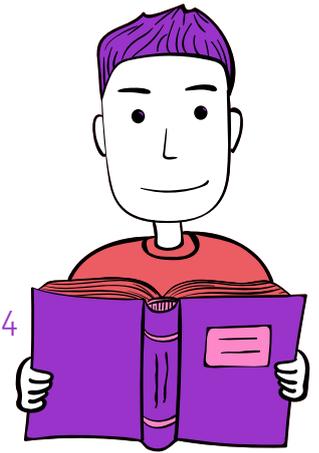
'Gliding through the shadows came
the walker in the night; the warriors slept
whose task was to hold the horned building,
all except one.'

Beowulf
translated by Michael Alexander
Penguin Books

ACTIVITY

1 Read students the section of Beowulf where Beowulf waits for Grendel (p. 26 in the Michael Alexander translation, published by Penguin). There is another version readily available on the Poetry Foundation website which you can find here:

poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/50114



2 This is a good moment to introduce students to the sound of Old English. This will appear very strange to them and open their ears to interesting sounds they can use in their poems. This version on YouTube will get their attention

youtube.com/watch?v=_K13GJkGvDw

3 As well as being very strange it is interesting for students to consider Old English as the source of the English they use themselves. A comparison of old and modern English versions of Beowulf can be found here:

heorot.dk/beowulf-rede-text.html

Ask students to point out words that are the same in both (such as 'in' 'he' and 'under') and those that are similar 'weox' / 'waxed'.



4 This is the perfect moment to introduce students to sound poetry! Start where sound poetry began by listening to Hugo Ball's Dada poem 'Karawane', performed first in 1916.

youtube.com/watch?v=z_8Wg40F3yo

Sound poems can draw heavily on vowels and / or consonants. Have a print out or screen to show the text of this poem, so they can see the poet's inventiveness with nonsense language. Are there more vowels or consonants here?

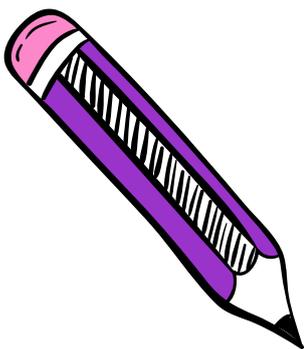
5 Students spend a few minutes writing their own sound poem. There is no way to get this wrong, all focus should be on creativity and impulse. They can sound their poems out before reading them and practice in pairs and groups. The more noise the better.



6 If there's time they can share some of their sound poems with the class.

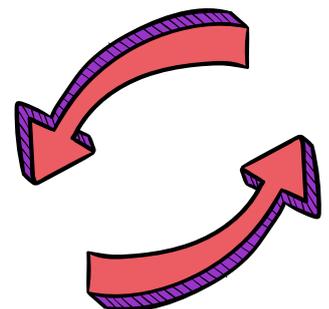
7 The class now listens to Edwin Morgan's 'Loch Ness Monster's Song' which can be found here: [dailymotion.com/video/xhnsnp_edwin-morgan-the-loch-ness-monster-s-song_creation](https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xhnsnp_edwin-morgan-the-loch-ness-monster-s-song_creation)

Have a print / screen with the text of the poem. Are there more consonants or vowels?



8 Bring the focus of the group to the moment in Beowulf where we left Beowulf waiting for Grendel. The class is now going to write a) a line in clear modern English that Beowulf says to Grendel and b) a line of sound poetry that Grendel says in response.

9 Split the class in two. First one side of the class is Beowulf, alternating their Beowulf lines with the Grendel lines from the other side of the class. They should then swap around, so everyone has a chance to be Grendel the sound poet.



If there's time make a visual version of the whole poem by asking students to write down their lines on paper, using colours and large letters, and adding them to a whiteboard in the classroom.

Congratulations – you've become a sound poet in the space of an hour.



THANKS

This resource was developed by poet Chris McCabe for National Poetry Day and first used with children at Alderman Cogan CE Primary School, Hull.

Discover more:

nationalpoetryday.co.uk

