

STUDENTS AT COLLEGE SAINT CHARLES – ENGLISH POETRY WRITING

Rozenn Herrouët:

I'm very pleased to be here today to talk about this poetry project that we've set up together. You know you and I have been working together for quite a while now, something like 10 years I think, and we've done very enthusiastic projects together with the pupils at school. But this year I wanted to do something different, I wanted to do something that I feel strongly about. And I thought: when we get together, Elaine and I, what do we talk about: literature and poetry. I remember this lunch we had together, and we were talking about those lines that got stuck in our head. And of course, my favourite is the one from Rimbaud: *"On n'est pas sérieux quand on a 17 ans...on va sous les tilleuls verts de la promenade"* or also the ones from Walt Whitman that are mentioned in the film *"Dead Poets Society"*. And those lines are:

"That you are here—that life exists and identity,

That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse"

And I thought that was very inspiring. What will the pupils' verse be? And the idea of the poetry project was born. Why not ask them to write their own poem? That was the beginning of this project.

I didn't realise that it was going to be pretty challenging for year 8 students to write poems. Because first they had this idea of translating their poem from French into English. And, of course, they soon realised that it wasn't a good way to do it. It didn't work out of course and it was very complicated to do it that way.

So, then they realised they needed to find words with the same vowel sounds, words like soon, moon, June, tune, balloon.

And I thank you, Elaine, when you sent us that poem from your 8 year old granddaughter because it helped us a lot, you know.

She actually wrote with those words:

"Soon the moon

will play a tune

using only a small balloon

maybe in June”

That was funny as well, and easy to understand, and then they got it, you know. And also, if an 8 year old English girl could do it, could write a poem like that, my 12 year old pupils, they had to show what they were capable of.

Academically speaking , writing poetry is good for language skills, because pupils needed to understand that rhyming words came from the vowel sounds. And they had to find four rhyming words, they had to count syllables, they had to check their pronunciation. That wasin factvery demanding. So, of course, there was an element of fun in writing poems because they had the freedom to choose any topics they wanted. Their poems were funny, sometimes absurd. But pupils also had to abide by the rules: rhyming words, lines, rhyme scheme...

So in fact it’s like life really: an element of fun and also rules to respect.

And then came up the difficult part: we had to select poems, and we had to select twelve poems only, out of the 2 classes we had: 501 and 504. And it was difficult for us to choose only twelve poems. But the twelve selected they really stood out in terms of clarity, vocabulary and also a good attempt at following the rhyme scheme.

ELLA

Some pupils really enjoyed the creativity part. They invented silly stories, you know! I think they had this song in their head, you know, the song from Queen: *“I want to break free”*, and this is what they did really.

CLEMENTINE

They could experience this very fulfilling creative feeling, you know, that we need to encourage at school.

Yeah, they loved the project, you know. Above all, they loved the creativity involved, of course, and the fact that could write on any topics they wanted, any topics: their annoying sister, their cute dog, Harry Potter who ended up being a silly boy after all, also an inspiring frog or even school, that they loved!



MAXIM

They also told me they got frustrated, in fact, because they wanted to write more, not only one stanza, you know; for them, that was not enough. They wanted to write a whole poem, but we had to keep it simple. So, four lines, that was difficult enough to do.

GABRIELLA

So, they found the project challenging in terms of finding the rhyming words and putting them all together in a nice, funny or poetic story. They also had to work on their pronunciation which was crucial. So, it was a very good exercise for them, to practice their pronunciation over and over again.

EDGAR

They also liked the competition part because it really stretched them. They had to give the best of themselves, they had to rewrite their poems and improve their poems, work on their pronunciation. That was hard sometimes. I had some tears in a class, well, they were soon forgotten, but I had tears, yes! I'm not going to say who...

GAËL

I must admit celebrity and fame was also something that attracted them. Hearing their own voice on the radio I think is the first step towards stardom, isn't it. Okay, 'bye-bye for now, bye-bye.