



A Portable Paradise – a great poetic stimulus

This fascinating article begins with Wenda Davies from Coastlands Community Primary School explaining what a powerful model a great poem like *Portable Paradise* can be to bring out children's natural creativity. The article ends with Kate Clanchy explaining how she has used the same idea with very powerful results when working with older pupils who were recent migrants.

At Coastlands, a small, village school by the sea in Pembrokeshire, we love reading and writing poetry. Our 'poem of the week' is a well-established tradition, and we are always looking for exciting, new poetic stimuli with which to inspire our children.

This year, our Year 5 and 6 children have been delighted to respond to various poetic challenges passed our way by Pie Corbett. One of the more recent challenges was to write a poem inspired by the title poem of Roger Robinson's TS Eliot-prize-winning collection, *A Portable Paradise*.

Portable Paradise

And if I speak of Paradise,
then I'm speaking of my grandmother
who told me to carry it always
on my person, concealed, so
no one else would know but me.
That way they can't steal it, she'd say.
And if life puts you under pressure,
trace its ridges in your pocket,
smell its piney scent on your handkerchief,
hum its anthem under your breath.

And if your stresses are sustained and daily,
get yourself to an empty room - be it hotel,
hostel or hovel - find a lamp
and empty your paradise onto a desk:
your white sands, green hills and fresh fish.
Shine the lamp on it like the fresh hope
of morning, and keep staring at it till you sleep.

- From *A Portable Paradise* by Roger Robinson (*Peepal Tree*, £9.99)

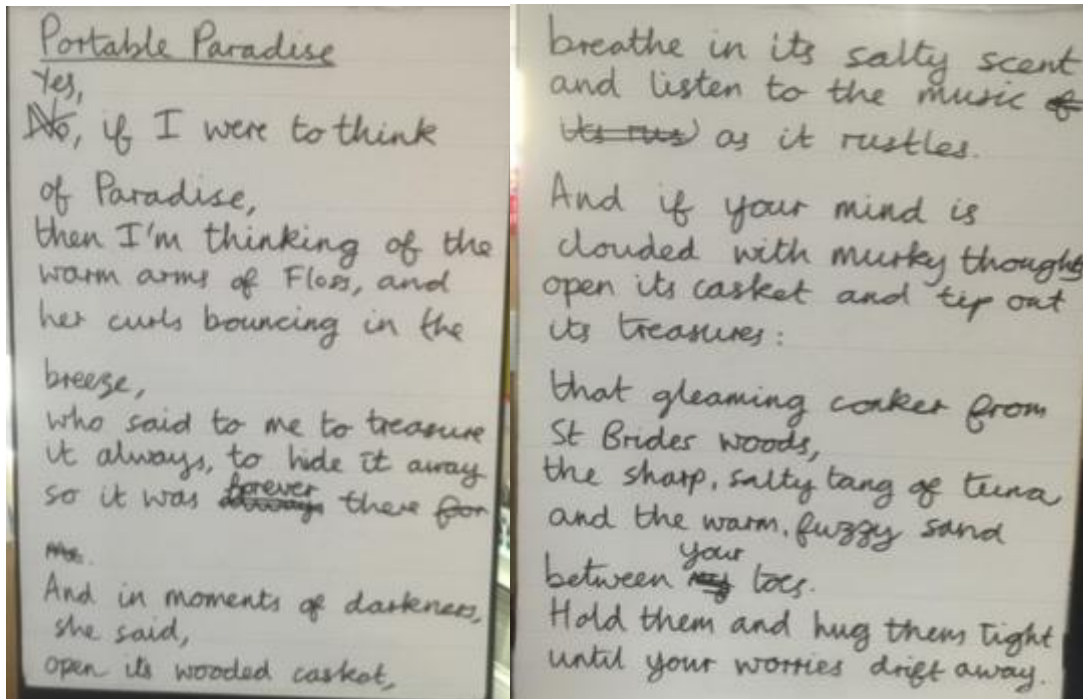
A Portable Paradise.

["The title poem for 'A Portable Paradise' was actually the very last poem written for the book. It originates in my experience of returning to England from Trinidad when I was 19. Before I left Trinidad, there was a popular song by an Australian band called Crowded House. The chorus went 'Everywhere you go always take the weather with you'. When faced with my first winter (when winter was really winter) I'd find myself singing that song to try and cheer up, as my left my Grandmother's house to go to my industrial laundry job. The work was arduous and I found myself constantly looking at pictures from Trinidad.

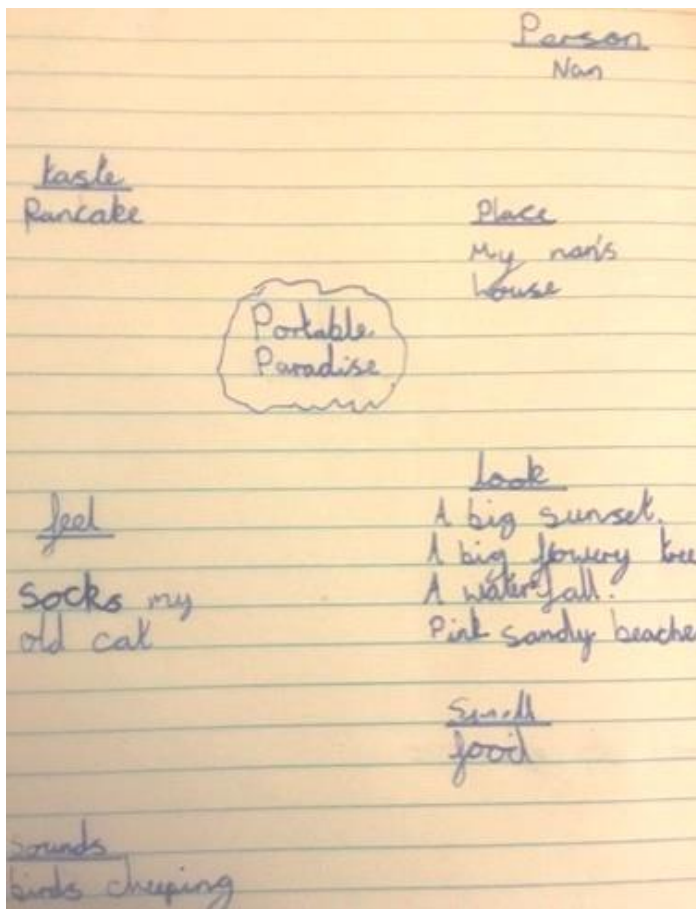
*I had started to take a few pictures with me to work, as if they were charms, to glance at them on the break. Eventually, I began to get a bit down and my grandmother noticed. She told me to walk tall and 'don't let them get to you, don't let them know how you feel'. The poem began to work when I gave a three-dimensional sensory feel to the pictures how they smelled, the texture, the quality of the light. This led me to make a diorama of sorts in my room at night. That gave the poem a magically real feeling of missing your home and rallying on with memories and a mission to make your life better." **Roger Robinson]***

To begin with, the poem featured as our poem of the week – so it was read, discussed and enjoyed each morning by the class. The children loved the poem. As they grew more familiar with it, they identified a structure that they might follow (if they wished to) and certain ideas such as the way the poem appeals to the senses and the use of repetition.

Shared writing was the next step. Armed with their jotters, the children briefly discussed each part or image and the class poem gradually unfolded, line by line, and was written up on the flipchart.



Now the children made brief jottings of their ideas in their books – some magpied lines and images from the poem, while others listed sense-impressions, places, alliterative phrases.



We often write our poems on our chrome books, so they can be freely edited and rearranged. Each child was now ready to create their first draft. Some hugged the original poem quite closely, while others were ready to be more inventive. Iestyn, for instance, defined his paradise by what it is *not*, while Lilly compared her more homely paradise with another person's more exotic idyll. We were delighted to send some of these poems to Pie, who provided the children with written suggestions for how to edit and improve them. Hopefully, you'll enjoy the poems and agree that the children rose very well to the challenge.

If you want to read more of our poems, you can find us on Twitter
@coastlandsnews, #coastlandspoets.

My Paradise

And if I speak of Paradise then I do not speak of these:
The sweet, icing-sugar sands of Maldives
Or the sparkling cascade of Aber Falls.
Mine is not the twisting, turning wonders
of the Patagonian caves,
Intertwined with blues and greens of marble.
Nor is it stolen by the submerged mystery of Playa de Amor
With its secret beach bordered by azure seas.
No, it is the smoky scent of open, campsite fires
And the taste of salmon, slow-cooked over an oil heater,
And the swell of the waves at Sandy Haven.
This is my paradise, a present from my father,
and hidden in a corner of my heart.

lestyn

Peaceful Paradise

No, if I were to speak of paradise,
I don't mean palm trees
on the coast of Hawaii,
Or the glinting sea,
Which lies on the edge of my view.
Nor do I mean the birds of that name,
Who spread their feathers to menace,
Or to conjure a carnival of colour.
No
If I speak of paradise,
Then I mean an empty room,
With no one but me, but me -
And the quiet snores of Dexter,
As he drifts off to sleep,
To sleep.

Freddie

Portable Paradise

Yes, if I were to talk about paradise
I would be talking about my mother's
Sun-warm smile under the ghost-white clouds.
She said to me to treasure it always,
Shielded and sheltered,
So it'll be there for me,
To calm me down.
So in the darkest of thoughts she said
Feel its folds through your pockets,
Make its shapes in your hands
And look at the everlasting forever.

My paradise is made from oak leaves
Scattered all over the grounds.
It's the scent of fresh pipefish on a sunny morning,
The taste of frozen winds.
And when days are dark,
I can squirrel the paradise away
And sift it in secret corners
Until dreams flood my eyes.

Helena

A Personal Paradise

I'm speaking of our paradise -
It starts with a little magic.
Your paradise would be climbing the tropical
Coloured mountains of
Zhangye National Geopark,
My paradise would be wrapped up
By the fire.
Your paradise would be strolling along
The pink beaches of Coralline sands,
My paradise would be watching the pastel-
Coloured spots flutter on the small tortoiseshell.
I empty my pockets and there it is -
The smell of my Nan's secret stew,
The scent of fresh-picked daisies.
My treasures fill my mind
With the winds of hope;
They sail against the seven seas,

Dart across the sun-soaked skies,
Jump from cloud to cloud.
Your paradise is the pearl-white sprays of
The rushing Niagara falls,
My paradise is to smell my Nan's fragrance;
Once again.

Lilly Nolan

Portable Paradise with Older Pupils – Kate Clanchy

These paradise poems were written in EMBS College, which is Oxford's 'Alternative Provision'. The students were recent migrants from Vietnam, East Timor, the Philippines, and all-over South America. I take a 'Talk for Writing' approach – that is, we read the poem in English several times together, then the students write their own version using the frame the poem provides. A Portable Paradise is a very powerful poem to use and has a strong structure too, and I think the student's poems are wonderful. Keep it up, Pie!

Sometimes

Sometimes I let myself think about
the unattainable place the magical place, paradise.
The feeling of that place, the feeling of peace, the feeling of pleasure -
The place where everything is happiness.

But I mustn't imagine it, I mustn't believe
Mustn't think about a non-existent place
when I am somewhere where happiness can really be found.

My heart yearns and wants to believe it.
My mind tells me not to fall.
I feel so much in these moments -
But I get myself up because I know
One day I will find my own paradise.

Alejandro, (18)

My Paradise

If we were to speak of paradise, I'd tell you
paradise is a place of happiness and hope.
Happiness for the people that have love
and have a complete family. The love
of one that can love you until the end of your life,
family that can protect you, teach you
to be a good person and have faith in god.

My paradise? I don't have a paradise
that I can carry with me, bring everywhere.
For me paradise is only a fairy tale. A story of a dream.

Norjhun (17)

Box

I will pack in my box
all the beautiful things about England.
White snowflakes covering the roof.
Maple leaves falling gently on the street.
Houses that are both ancient and modern.
Even the way people treat me,
so kind, cheerful and enthusiastic.
And you can take it away,

and send me a back a box of air
from Vietnam.

Dũng (17)

Things I Carry on the Plane

I carry tears in my ears and goodbyes to my family and my favourite
person and my friends.
I carry the special words my mum said to me, the words that make me
happy and sad.
I carry memories of my prettiest sister, the sister who loves me so much,
our memories together.

I carry the times I spent with my brothers who are so cute, who I love so much

I carry memories of my friend, the special times when we went out to have fun together; the memories that I can never forget.

I carry the smell of my mum's food. I will always smell her cooking, It will always makes me hungry.

I carry the sunshine with me, the sunshine of East Timor. Beautiful and joyous sunshine.

I carry my mother tongue.

Murak Darling.

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