# Acrostic Poem

by Tim Upperton
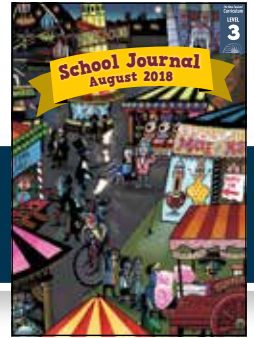
## Overview

This TSM contains information and suggestions for teachers to pick and choose from, depending on the needs of their students and their purpose for using the text. The materials provide many opportunities for revisiting the text.

While many students enjoy poetry, others find its form and figurative language difficult and unappealing. The acrostic poem is often seen by teachers as a good way into poetry writing. However, while its simple formula makes an acrostic poem easy enough to write, the product is often mundane. In this poem about writing poetry, Tim Upperton subverts the form of the acrostic to show what can happen when the words and ideas are let free. This is a poem that speaks to students' experiences as readers and writers of poetry and makes it fun.

This poem:

- uses an extended metaphor to introduce and challenge a traditional poetic form
- opens up a whole new way of thinking about, reading, and creating acrostic poetry
- may make converts of students who have not enjoyed their previous experiences with poetry.

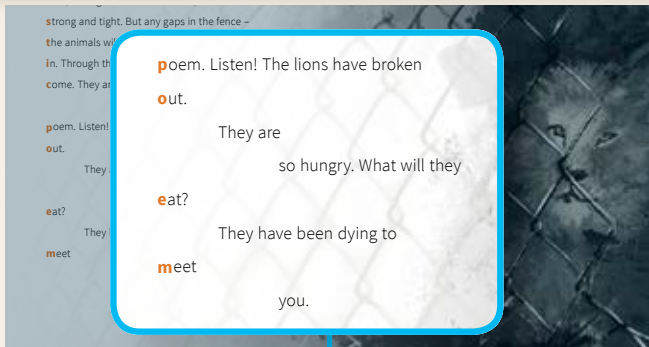A PDF of the text is available at www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz

| Texts related by theme | "No Rhyme" SJ L3 Aug 2015 | "Not Your Normal Tent" SJ L3 Nov 2016 | "Close Up" SJ L2 Nov 2016 |

## Text characteristics from the year 6 reading standard

We have retained the links to the National Standards while a new assessment and reporting system is being developed.
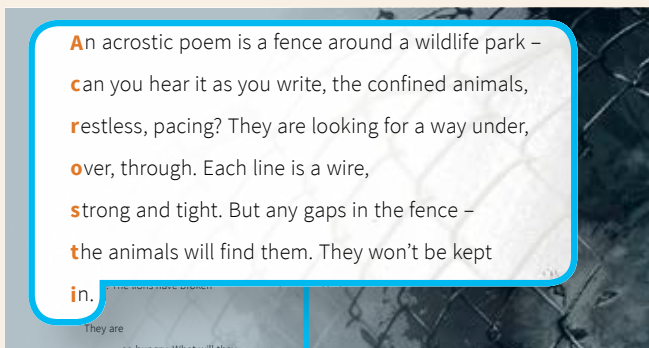For more information on assessing and reporting in the post-National Standards era, see: http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Assessment-and-reporting-guide



poem. Listen! The lions have broken
out.
They are
so hungry. What will they
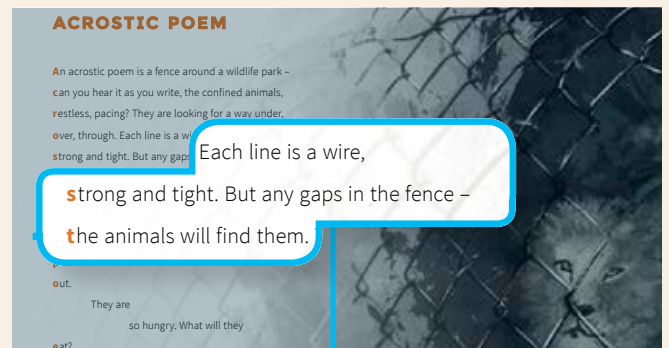eat?
They have been dying to
meet
you.

abstract ideas, in greater numbers than in texts at earlier levels, accompanied by concrete examples in the text that help support the students' understanding



Through the gaps, the wild creatures
come. They are escaping from your
poem.

*Tim Upperton*
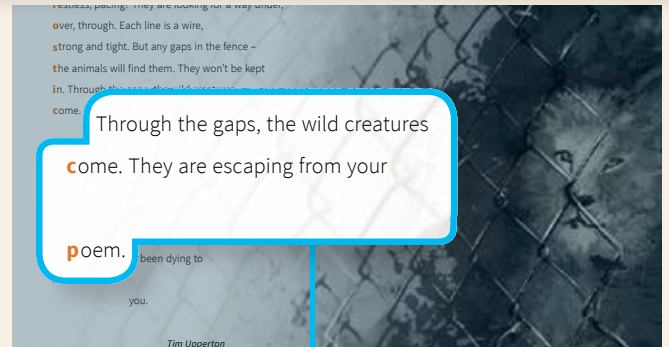
some ideas and information that are conveyed indirectly and require students to infer by drawing on several related pieces of information in the text



An acrostic poem is a fence around a wildlife park –
can you hear it as you write, the confined animals,
restless, pacing? They are looking for a way under,
over, through. Each line is a wire,
strong and tight. But any gaps in the fence –
the animals will find them. They won't be kept
in.

sentences that vary in length and in structure (for example, sentences that begin in different ways and different kinds of complex sentences with a number of subordinate clauses)



### ACROSTIC POEM

An acrostic poem is a fence around a wildlife park –
can you hear it as you write, the confined animals,
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Each line is a wire,
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figurative and/or ambiguous language that the context helps students to understand

Reading standard: by the end of year 6

# Text and language challenges

(Some of the suggestions for possible supporting strategies may be more useful before reading, but they can be used at any time in response to students' needs.)

## VOCABULARY

- Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases, including "acrostic", "wildlife park", "confined", "restless", "pacing", "creatures", "broken out"

### Possible supporting strategies

- Identify words or phrases that may be unfamiliar to your students and discuss these when introducing the poem before reading.
- Work with the students to come up with an action that represents each new word by expressing something of the meaning of the word (for example, for "confined", they could make a circle with their hands). Then, when reading the word, the students use the associated action. This makes word learning fun and helps to cement the meaning.
- *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.
- See also ESOL Online, Vocabulary, for examples of other strategies to support students with vocabulary.

## SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED

- Familiarity with poetry, in particular, acrostic poetry
- Familiarity with wildlife parks

### Possible supporting strategies

- Prompt the students to think, pair, and share their experiences of reading and writing poetry.
- Most students will know about zoos, but they may not know about wildlife parks. Have students who have been to a wildlife park share their experiences or display pictures from books or the internet. Discuss how a wild animal might feel about being kept in confinement.

## TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

- An acrostic poem in two stanzas
- Bold letters at the start of each line that together spell the title of the poem
- The direct address to the reader and the conversational tone
- The important role of punctuation in showing how the poem should be read, including the use of the dash
- The extended metaphor as the poet compares the form of an acrostic poem with a wildlife park, with its fences and regulations, and the poet's creative spirit with a wild animal that cannot be held captive
- The change in structure that matches the change in the action – the lions break out at the same time as the poet moves to a freer verse form
- The implicit threat and potential pun in the words "They are so hungry. What will they eat?" and "They have been dying to meet you."

### Possible supporting strategies

- Focus on the concept of poetic form – the physical structure of a poem that is created by the poet's decisions about line length, rhythm, rhyme, and repetition. Invite the students to share examples of poetic forms that they are familiar with. Some may have experimented with writing acrostic poetry. *How did you find it? What was it like, writing to a particular formula?*
- Have the students look at this poem before revealing the title. *What do you notice about the form of this particular poem? Do you know what this sort of poem is called?* Reveal the title and check that the students understand that an acrostic poem is one in which sets of letters – typically the first in each line – make another word or sentence linked to the theme of the poem.
- Explain that the poem includes an extended metaphor. Have the students think, pair, and share their understandings of what a metaphor is. *What are some examples of metaphors we have encountered in other poems or stories?* If necessary, remind them that a metaphor suggests a similarity between two things, but that it doesn't use "like", "as", "than", "similar to", and "resembles".
- It could be fun for students, and particularly helpful for English language learners, to start collecting and recording metaphors in conversations, in the media, or in songs. At the end of the term, they could make up categories and vote on their favourites (for example, "best sporting metaphor", "most romantic metaphor", "silliest metaphor").
- If the students need more practice in creating metaphors, give them a list of metaphors and have them explain how the two things are alike. Model a few examples first (for example, "The road snakes around the mountain" – roads and snakes both bend and curve).

**Sounds and Words**

# Possible curriculum contexts

**ENGLISH (Reading)**

Level 3 – Ideas: Show a developing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

– Language features: Show a developing understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.

**ENGLISH (Writing)**

Level 3 – Ideas: Select, form, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.

– Language features: Use language features appropriately, showing a developing understanding of their effects.

**Possible first reading purpose**

- To identify the main message of the poem.

**Possible subsequent reading purposes**

- To identify and consider the writer's purpose
- To explore the language features and devices
- To identify and discuss the connection between the format and the main ideas
- To explore the way language is used to create an extended metaphor
- To evaluate the writer's choices.

**Possible writing purposes**

- To use the poem as a model to create their own acrostic poem
- To respond to the poem.

**The New Zealand Curriculum**

# Instructional focus – Reading

**English** Level 3 – Ideas: Show a developing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts; Language features: Show a developing understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.

## First reading

- Check that the students understand the form of an acrostic poem. Prompt them to scan the poem, noticing how the bold letters spell out the words of the title. *Why do you think these letters are in bold type? Why are there two stanzas?*
- You could project the text onto a screen when you do this.
- Share the purpose of the reading with the students.
- Direct the students to read the poem with a partner, pausing at the end of each stanza to share their impressions. Listen in on their conversations, noting where they may require additional support.

### If the students require more scaffolding

- After reading each stanza, ask questions to help the students make sense of the poem. *How does Tim Upperton describe acrostic poems in the first stanza? How is that reflected in the way he writes that first stanza? What happens in the second stanza? How is that reflected in the structure of the poem? What does Tim Upperton think about acrostic poetry? How do you know?*
- If the students have difficulty making sense of the metaphor, explain that words and phrases can have two meanings – the literal meaning and the metaphorical meaning – and discuss some examples.
- Point out that we often use metaphors in everyday speech and can create "metaphorical sets" around a particular topic (for example, around the body: "in the blink of an eye", "in the heart of the city"). Present some topics and invite the students to brainstorm metaphors that are related to those topics. Discuss what they mean, literally and figuratively. Having had this support, prompt the students to identify the metaphorical sets in this poem.

## Subsequent readings
How you approach subsequent readings will depend on your reading purpose.
Where possible, have the students work in pairs to discuss the following questions and prompts.

### The teacher

Reread the poem with the students and have them sketch the images that come into their heads. Have them share their sketches with a partner and annotate them, using words and phrases from the poem. Talk about the words the groups selected for their sketches and what message they think the poet is trying to convey with the image of animals in a wildlife park. Discuss the effect of the writer's viewpoint.

- *What is the effect of the direct address to the reader? How do you feel about the hungry lions who are "dying to meet you"?*
- *Why does the writer say an acrostic poem is like a fence around a wildlife park?*

Then discuss the structure of the poem and how it reflects the content.

- *How does the structure change from the first stanza to the second? Why do you think it changes?*
- *Has the writer kept to the rules for an acrostic poem? Why do you say this?*

### The teacher

Ask the students to think about the different lengths of pause (indicated by the punctuation marks and line breaks) and the tone (indicated by the question mark and exclamation mark) and discuss these with a partner. Work towards an oral reading that reflects the intended pace and rhythm of the poem.

- *What do you notice about the punctuation in this poem? How do you think it should be read?*
- *What is the difference between the length of the pause indicated by a comma, a dash, or the punctuation marks at the end of the sentences? How might this sound if we clapped it out?*
- *What other punctuation marks give us clues about how the poem should be read out loud?*

Have the students work in small groups or pairs to prepare an oral presentation of the poem. One student could be the reader with the others coaching. They could record their presentations. Ensure that the person reading out loud is well supported so that they enjoy success. Assist English Language Learners with the pronunciation, intonation, pitch, speed, and run-ons of spoken English. Provide explicit feedback and modelling.

### The students:

- visualise the images that the poem creates and identify the words and phrases that help create those images
- make connections between the idea of animals in a wildlife park and the creative spirit embodied in the words of a poem
- identify the writer's central metaphor and track its development through changes in the words, imagery, and structure
- use what they know about the form of an acrostic poem to make judgments about whether this poem is true to its form.

### The students:

- explore how the punctuation marks in the poem provide clues for how it should be read – its tone, pace, and rhythm
- in pairs or small groups, discuss their interpretations of the writer's intention
- discuss the effectiveness of the writer's choices of layout and style
- collaborate to prepare oral presentations that they believe reflect the writer's intention.

**Subsequent readings (cont.)**

**The teacher**

Discuss the idea of poetic forms and structures.

- *An acrostic is one form of poem. What are some other examples of poetic forms?*
- *What is special about each form? Think about things like rhythm, rhyme, line length, and repetition.*

Explain that for many people, the form of a poem is its discipline. It creates a framework that can intensify the feelings and ideas the poet is trying to convey. It can also make a poem more satisfying to read and easier to remember. But as with most things, when we know the rules, we can use our judgment to break them when the time is right.

Have the students read Tim Upperton's poem "No Rhyme" (*School Journal*, L3, August 2015) and compare it with "Acrostic Poem".

- *What is similar about the messages and the way they are conveyed? What does he do with the form of both poems?*
- *Do you agree with the point Tim Upperton is making in these poems? Why or why not?*
- *What do you think of these poems? Thinking back to our earlier discussion about previous experiences of reading or writing poetry, have your thoughts changed? How do you feel about reading or writing poetry now?*

**The students:**

- make connections with other poems they have read and with another poem by Tim Upperton
- discuss the concept and purpose of poetic form
- identify other forms of poetry, such as haiku, limericks, and sonnets, and identify some of the elements that characterise them
- think critically about Tim Upperton's poetry and his message about poetic form
- identify the writer's message(s) and discuss whether they agree
- evaluate the effectiveness of this poem and its impact on them as readers and potential writers of poetry.

**GIVE FEEDBACK**

- *I'm really impressed by the connection you made between a game of rugby and its rules and techniques and a poem. Did you notice that you created a metaphor of your own when you talked about how the magic happens when someone who knows the rules well and has learned all the plays busts out and does something different and exciting?*

**METACOGNITION**

- *How did your work in preparing the oral presentation affect your understanding of the poem? Did it make more sense as you thought about how to read it out loud? What was the effect of working with other people and hearing their ideas?*

**Reading standard: by the end of year 6**

**The Literacy Learning Progressions**

**Assessment Resource Banks**

# Instructional focus – Writing

**English** Level 3 – Language features: Use language features appropriately, showing a developing understanding of their effects; Ideas: Select, form, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.

| Text excerpts from "Acrostic Poem" | Examples of text characteristics | Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching) |
|---|---|---|
| Through the gaps, the wild creatures **c**ome. | **METAPHOR**<br><br>*A metaphor is a comparison between two things that we don't usually think of as being connected to each other. We use metaphors in everyday life, often without thinking (for example, "it was a race against time"). In poetry and songs, metaphors can create powerful images that reinforce our message.* | If you haven't already done so, introduce the term "metaphorical set" (see the First Reading section). Have the students work in groups to create metaphorical sets based around familiar topics, such as the weather ("sunny days are here again"), colours ("I see red"), plants ("the root of the problem"), or sports ("hit it out of the park"). Give them time for research and to design their charts (for example, they might sketch a garden and annotate the different parts with relevant metaphors).<br><br>**DIGITAL TOOLS** 💻 They could use Google Drawings to work collaboratively to combine images and text. (This also makes it easier to share the charts in the next activity.) |
| Each line is a wire, **s**trong and tight. | **POETIC FORM**<br><br>*Many traditional poems have a regular structure, so we know what to expect. Others are written in free verse, where the poet is free to make their own choices about the use of rhyme, the numbers of syllables or lines, the punctuation, or the way the lines are formed. This doesn't mean that their poem is random – good poets still carefully choose the words and form that they think will convey a feeling or idea as effectively as possible.* | Have the students share their charts and use the metaphors as inspiration for writing their own acrostic poems.<br><br>**DIGITAL TOOLS** 💻 They could add their charts to a shared Google Slides presentation.<br><br>Tell the students that they can stick to the form, break out into free verse, or stretch the form but not quite break it in the way that Tim Upperton does.<br><br>• *These are your poems, and you can do what you like, so long as you have thought about it and made a deliberate choice.*<br><br>Support the students to identify the structure or language features they will use as they write their poems.<br><br>• *What is the idea or the feeling you're trying to convey in your poem? What makes this metaphor suitable for conveying your ideas? What is the connection you are making?*<br>• *What structure will best help you achieve your purpose?*<br>• *Do you think you will stick with the same structure throughout? Or is there a part where you might want to include some free verse?*<br>• *What are some other poetic devices you could try that might help convey your message? How about using rhyme to emphasise an idea or including some onomatopoeia – words that sound like the thing they are naming?*<br>• *Is there a way you could get the rhythm to help hint at the idea you are conveying?*<br><br>Prompt the students to keep the sounds in mind.<br><br>• *How does your poem sound when you read it aloud? What happens when a partner reads it aloud?*<br>• *Do you need to use punctuation to add further clues to how to read the poem?* |

| Text excerpts from "Acrostic Poem" | Examples of text characteristics | Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching) |
|---|---|---|
| **A**n acrostic poem is a fence around a wildlife park – **c**an you hear, as you write, the confined animals, restless, pacing? | **PERSUASIVE WRITING** *Persuasive writing is used to convince someone to take a position on a particular issue or to take a certain action. It requires a clear sense of purpose and an awareness of the audience and what drives them.* | Having discussed their response to the poem and its message, have the students put their thoughts into writing. They might want to respond to the poem itself, explaining why they did or did not like it, or they may want to focus on the poem's message, explaining how they feel about the rules of an acrostic poem and whether they should be broken. You could support the students by providing them with a writing frame with prompts that include: |

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- Topic
- Opinion
- Lead sentence:
- Reason 1 …
  - Evidence
- Reason 2 …
  - Evidence (and so on)
- Opinion – restated

Prompt the students to quote from the poem to explain their reasoning. Remind them what they learned from listening to each other during the discussion. *You already know a lot about what your audience thinks and believes about this poem. What are some strong points you could make that might persuade your readers to your point of view? What are some counter-arguments that you need to address?*

**GIVE FEEDBACK**
- *I love the way you've shared your love of the beach in your poem. Your use of metaphor to describe the sounds of the waves washing in on the shore is very visual, and "swish" is a good choice of word – I can hear it! Is there a way you could emphasise that sound in the rhythm of your poem?*

**METACOGNITION**
- *Tell me why you decided on this particular structure. What is the relationship between the structure of your poem and the idea you were trying to convey?*

Writing standard: by the end of year 6

The Literacy Learning Progressions

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