

Children and young people's engagement with poetry in 2023

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Introduction

In 2022, we found that there had been a steady increase in the number of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who read poetry over the past decade, with 3 in 10 children and young people saying that they read poetry in their free time in early 2022. We also showed that children and young people weren't just consumers of poetry, many (1 in 5) also wrote poetry in their free time.

This year, we asked questions about poetry again in our Annual Literacy Survey, a survey of children and young people's literacy habits and attitudes. In early 2023, 64,066 children and young people aged 8 to 18 from 285 schools from across the UK took part.

This data will be complemented by insight from children and young people who participated in the evaluations of our poetry-based programmes as they offer detailed insight into why they didn't engage with poetry before taking part in our programmes.

**“I think writing poetry creates a
whole new life for me”**

(Girl, Y10)

Key findings from 2023:

Children and young people as readers of poetry in 2023

- 1 in 4 (26.7%) children and young people said in 2023 that they read poetry in their free time at least once a month, with 16.3% reading poems on paper, 7.5% reading poems on screen and 2.9% reading poems across both media.
 - This is a slight decrease compared with the previous year when 28.0% of children and young people said that they read poetry in their free time.
- More girls than boys read poetry in their free time in 2023 (31.2% vs 21.8%). The percentage of those who read poetry in their free time decreased with age, with twice as many children aged 8 to 11 (46.5%) saying that they read poetry in their free time compared with those aged 11 and older (around 22%).
- In line with our previous findings, more children and young people who received FSMs read poetry in their free time than their peers who didn't receive FSMs (32.2% vs 24.3%).
- More children and young people in England said that they read poetry in their free time (26.9%), followed by those in Wales (25.3%). Fewer children and young people in Scotland (16.5%) and Northern Ireland said that they read poetry in their free time (14.5%). The percentage for Northern Ireland, however, needs to be treated with caution as only a small number of children and young people from NI took part in this year's survey.
- Compared with their peers who didn't read poetry in their free time, more of those who did told us that they enjoyed reading (58.5% vs 37.9%). More also read something daily in their free time (37.7% vs. 24.4%) and more saw themselves as good readers (84.3% vs. 74.5%).
 - There were no differences in reading enjoyment levels, daily reading levels or levels of reading confidence between those who read poetry on paper or those who read it on screen. However, levels were higher across the board for those who read poetry both on paper and on screen.

Children and young people as writers of poetry in 2023

- 1 in 6 (17.6%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 said in 2023 that they wrote poetry in their free time at least once a month; most (10.8%) of those who wrote poetry in their free time did so on paper, while 4.5% did so on screen. Only 2% of children and young people who told us that they wrote poetry in their free time did so both on paper and on screen.
- While we saw an increase in the number of children and young people who read poetry in their free time between 2010 and 2022, the number of children and young people who said that they wrote poems in their free time at least once a month decreased in 2023 and is now on par with levels we saw in 2010 (17.7%).
- More girls than boys wrote poetry in their free time (20.2% vs 14.0%). The percentage of those who wrote poetry in their free time decreased with age, with three times as many children aged 8 to 11 (35.1%) saying that they wrote poetry in their free time compared with those aged 14 and older (11%).
- As with reading poetry, slightly more children who received FSMs said that they wrote poetry in their free time than their peers who didn't receive FSMs (21.9% vs 15.3%).
- More children and young people in Wales told us that they wrote poetry in their free time (21.1%), followed by those in England (17.3%). Fewer children and young people in Scotland (9.7%) and Northern Ireland (9.4%) said that they wrote poetry in their free time. However, as before, the percentage for Northern Ireland needs to be treated with caution as only a small number of children and young people from NI took part in this year's survey.
- More children and young people from the North East, West Midlands and Greater London said that they wrote poetry in their free time compared with their peers in other regions, while children and young people from the South East and the South West were least likely to say that they wrote poetry in their free time. These two regions also had the fewest children and young people reading poetry in their free time.
- More children and young people who wrote poetry also said that they enjoyed writing more generally compared with their peers who didn't write poetry (58.6% vs. 29.5%). More also wrote something in their free time daily (30.8% vs. 16.9%) and more considered themselves to be good writers (80.4% vs. 65.4%).
- There were no differences in writing enjoyment levels, daily writing levels or levels of writing confidence between those who wrote poetry on paper or those who wrote it on screen. However, levels were higher across the board

for those who wrote poetry both on paper and on screen.

When readers of poetry are also writers of poetry

- There is a strong positive relationship ($r = .51$) between children and young people being readers of poetry and them being writers of poetry as well.
 - Indeed, 1 in 2 (48.0%) children and young people who read poetry in their free time also told us that they wrote poetry in their free time compared with only 6.1% of those who didn't read poetry in their free time.

Supporting children and young people to engage with poetry

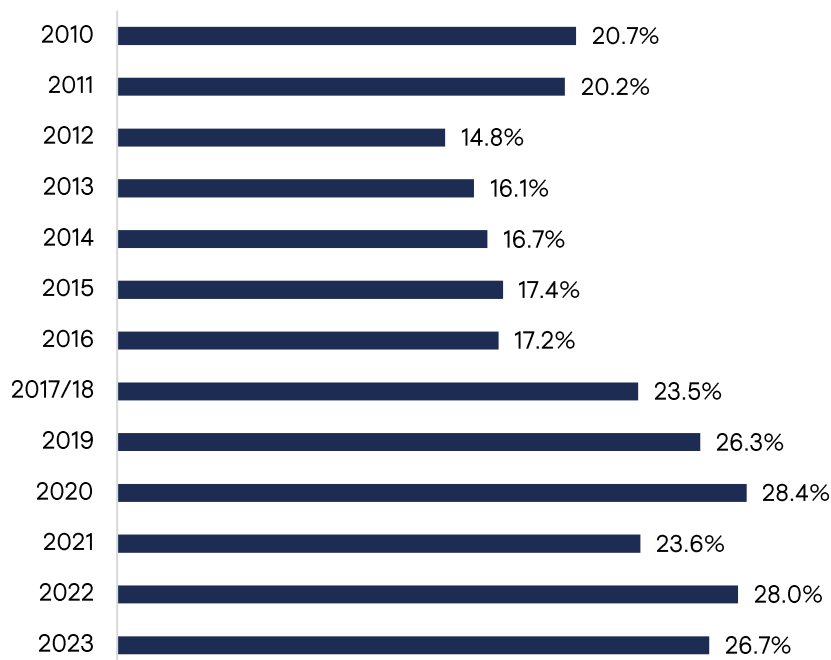
- Across our Young Poets projects, we found that children and young people engaged with poetry after visiting places of cultural importance for inspiration and learning from a local poet.
 - Nearly half (46.0%) of participating students enjoyed listening to poems more after taking part in Young Poets.
 - 2 in 5 (39.3%) enjoyed writing poetry more.
 - 1 in 3 (34.8%) read poems more.
 - 4 in 5 (83.8%) told us that their poetry-writing had improved.
 - 3 in 4 (75.7%) told us they enjoyed being able to choose what they wrote about.
 - 2 in 3 (66.7%) told us that they felt creative when they wrote poems.
 - 2 in 3 (68.6%) told us that working with a poet was 'very good' (34.7%) or 'good' (33.9%).
 - Crucially, the number of pupils writing weekly increased from 1 in 3 before (34.3%) to half of pupils afterwards (50.4%). Those writing daily doubled (13.3% vs 6.6%).
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Children and young people as readers of poetry

In 2023, 1 in 4 (26.7%, n = 17,135) children and young people aged 8 to 18 said they had read poetry in their free time at least once a month, with 16.3% reading poems on paper, 7.5% reading poems on screen and 2.9% reading poems across both media.

Figure 1 shows that there has been quite a bit of variation over the past 13 years in the percentage of children and young people who said that they read poetry in their free time. After recording the lowest percentage in 2012, when only around 1 in 7 said that they read poetry in their spare time at least once a month, rates then steadily increased until 2020 when we evidenced the highest number of children and young people reading poetry just before the first national lockdown in 2020. Levels fell in 2021 but recovered in 2022, only to fall again slightly in 2023.

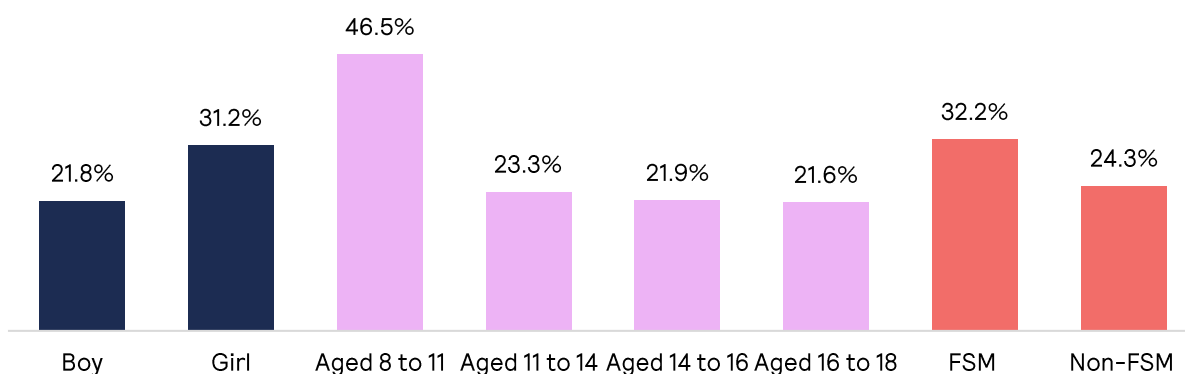
Figure 1: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who read poetry in their spare time at least once a month between 2010 and 2023



Who are the children and young people who read poetry in 2023?

As shown in Figure 2, as we see with reading and writing more widely, some children and young people were engaging with poetry more than others¹. For example, more girls than boys said that they read poetry in their free time. The differences between children and young people were most marked when looking at age groups, with twice as many children aged 8 to 11 than any of the other age groups saying that they read poetry in their spare time. In line with our previous findings, more of those who received FSMs said that they read poetry in their spare time compared with those who did not receive FSMs.

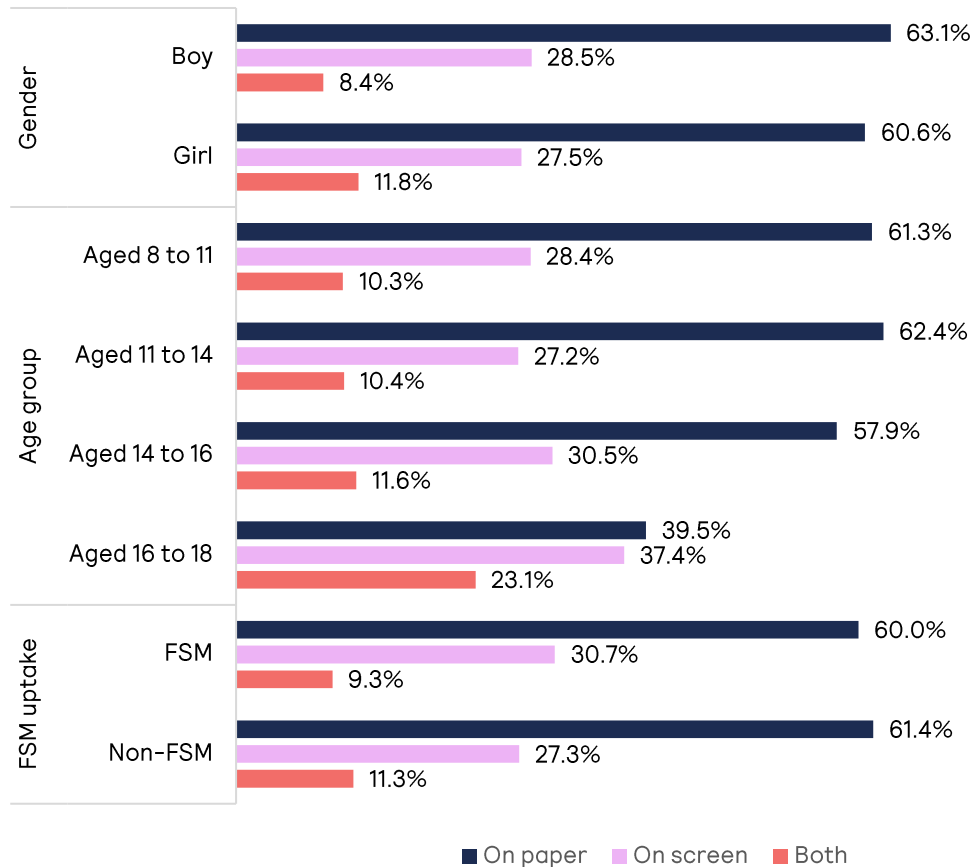
Figure 2: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who read poetry in their free time at least once a month in 2023 by gender, key stage and FSM status



While most children and young people aged 8 to 18 who read poetry in their spare time did so on paper, Figure 3 highlights some interesting variations, particularly with regards to those aged 16 to 18. Of those who read poetry in their free time, almost as many of those aged 16 to 18 read it on paper as they did on screen, and, compared with any of the other groups, most of them (1 in 4) read poetry across both media.

¹ Boys aged 5 to 8: 46.4% (n = 3,383), girls aged 5 to 8: 49.2% (n = 3,587), 0.7% (n = 54) described themselves another way, 3.6% (n = 261) didn't want to state their gender. Boys aged 8 to 18: (n = 30,077, 46.9%), girls aged 8 to 18: (31,076, 48.5%), 2.3% (n = 1,485) didn't want to specify their gender and 2.2% (n = 1,428) described themselves another way. Aged 5 to 8 = 9.2% (n = 6,444); aged 8 to 11 = 15.8% (n = 10,127); aged 11 to 14 = 66.4% (n = 42,523); aged 14 to 16 = 15.1% (n = 9,667); aged 16 to 18 = 2.7% (n = 1,749). For those aged 8 to 18 only: FSM: 16.3% (n = 10,418); non-FSM: 72.0% (n = 46,116); didn't want to say: 1.6% (n = 1,046); didn't know: 10.1% (n = 6,486). The demographic make-up of our 2023 sample was largely comparable with that of 2022 and previous samples.

Figure 3: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 reading poetry on paper, on screen or across both formats in 2023 by gender, age group and FSM uptake



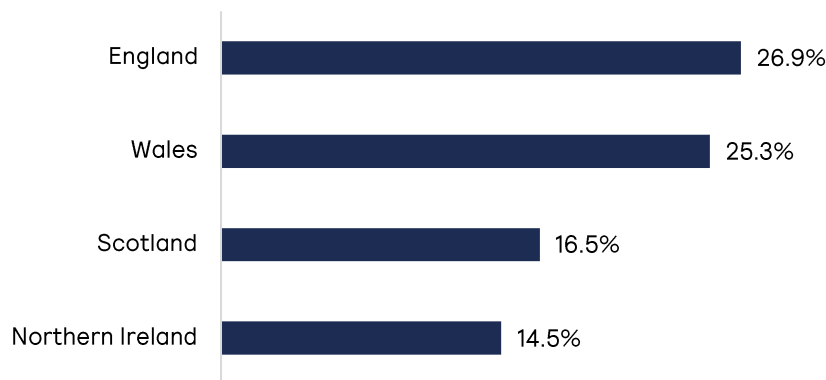
Children and young people reading poetry by geographical region

Whether children and young people read poetry in their free time differed somewhat depending on where in the UK² they went to school. As shown in Figure 4, more children and young people in England said that they read poetry in their free time, followed by those who went to school in Wales. Fewer children and young people in Scotland and Northern Ireland said that they read poetry in their free time. However, the percentage for Northern Ireland needs to be treated with

² 61,329 children and young people aged 8 to 18 from England, 1,541 from Scotland, 1,058 from Wales and 138 from Northern Ireland participated in 2023.

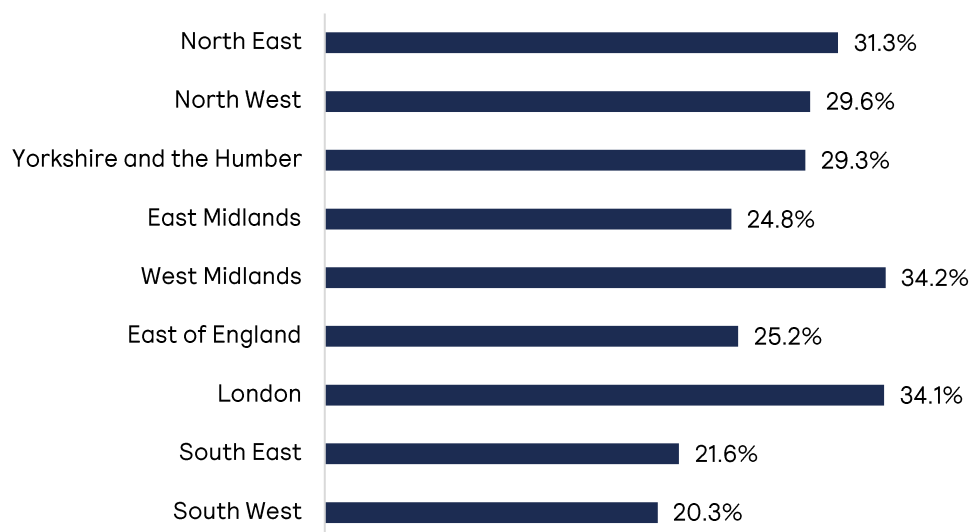
caution as only a small number of children and young people from NI took part in this year's survey.

Figure 4: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who read poetry in their free time in 2023 by UK nation



Differences in England are further broken down by region in Figure 5. It shows that more children and young people from the West Midlands, Greater London and the North East said that they read poetry in their free time compared with their peers in other regions. The smallest percentage of children and young people who said that they read poetry in their free time came from the South East and the South West.

Figure 5: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who read poetry in their free time in 2023 by region in England

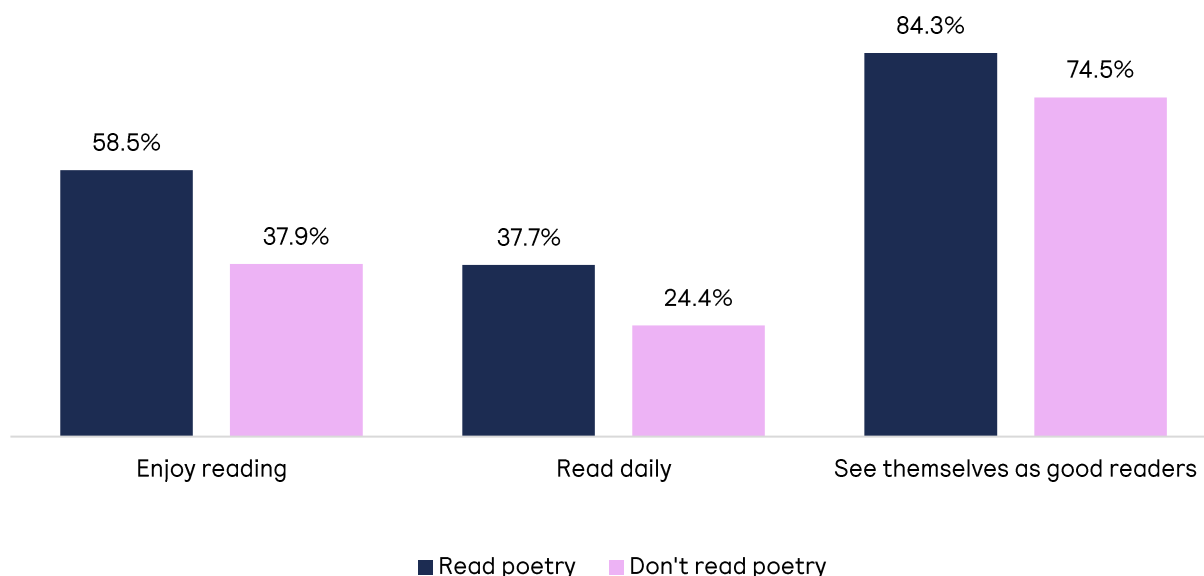


Reading poetry and reading enjoyment, reading habits and reading confidence

Just like in previous years (e.g. [Cole et al., 2022](#)), we were interested to explore whether and how children and young people’s reading enjoyment, reading frequency and reading confidence differed depending on whether they were readers of poetry or not.

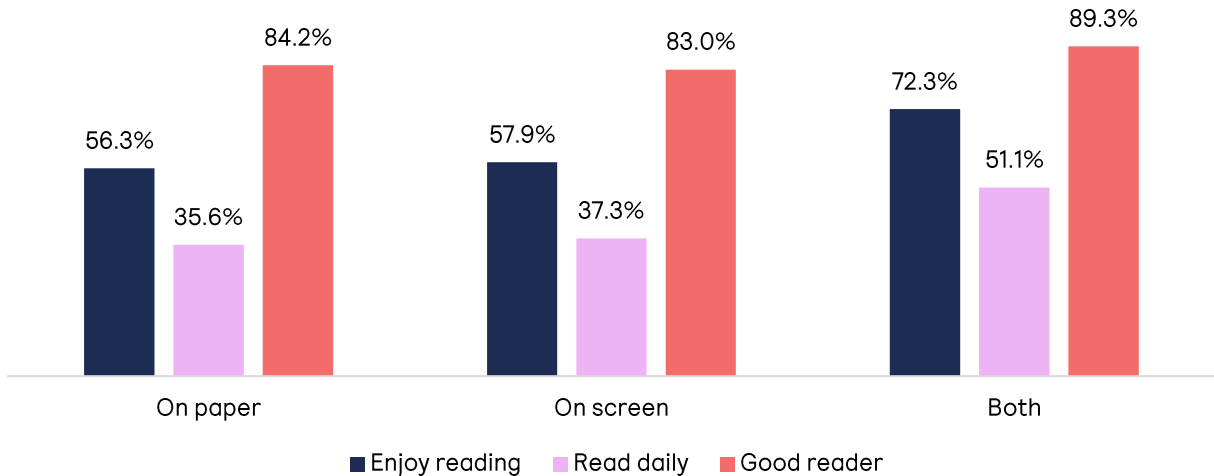
As shown in Figure 6, more of those who read poetry said that they enjoyed reading compared with their peers who didn’t read poetry in their free time. Additionally, more of those who read poetry in their free time also read daily and more self-reported being good readers compared with their peers who didn’t read poetry in their free time.

Figure 6: Reading enjoyment, daily reading and self-reported reading skill by whether or not children and young people aged 8 to 18 read poetry in 2023



Again, looking at those who read poetry more closely, levels of reading enjoyment, daily reading and self-reported reading confidence are very similar between those who read poetry on paper and those who read poetry on screen (see Figure 7). However, more of those who read poetry across both media reported the highest levels of reading enjoyment, daily reading and self-reported reading confidence. This could possibly reflect that those who read across both platforms had access to a wider variety of reading material, so read more and were more confident. However, there could be alternative explanations.

Figure 7: Reading enjoyment, daily reading and self-reported reading skill by whether those who read poetry in 2023 did so on paper, on screen or on both media



We were interested to hear in children and young people’s own words why they chose to read, listen, and watch poetry beyond the classroom setting. Some children told us that they read poetry because they found it enjoyable:

“Poems interest me.” (Girl, Y11)

“I sometimes read poems on social media like once a month and it’s very nice.” (Girl, Y9)

“At home I go online and find poem books I can listen to or read from the screen. [...]. Also, when I am at school, I search for any poem books and read them because I love poems.” (Girl, Y4)

“I like to read poetry and non-fiction books.” (Boy, Y5)

“I like to read classics such as Edgar Allan Poe, however I am very interested in Japanese literature movements! So, this includes the novelists Edogawa Ranpo and Osamu Dazai as well as poets such as Chūya Nakahara.” (Boy, Y11)

Others told us they liked reading poetry to understand, whether that was their own feelings or new information:

“Reading poems helps me understand my feelings.” (Girl, Y8)

“I only read poetry to get stuff off my mind because when I read it, it makes me feel calm and a little bit happier.” (Girl, Y8)

“I don't really read but when I do it helps me understand how to write poems and it helps me understand new words.” (Girl, Y11)

Some children and young people told us that they preferred reading poetry to other genres:

“I am very busy with other stuff and sometimes reading can make me bored. I only read poetry books because I like reading poems.” (I would rather not say, Y7)

“Boring, it goes on and on – I prefer poems.” (Girl, Y10)

“I like poems more than books.” (Boy, Y7)

There are multiple ways to consume poetry and a number of children and young people told us that they liked listening to poetry:

“[I like listening to] very old readings of old books and spoken poetry.” (Boy, Y8)

Altogether these findings, alongside open-text comments from children, help us build a clearer picture of why children and young people choose to consume poetry.

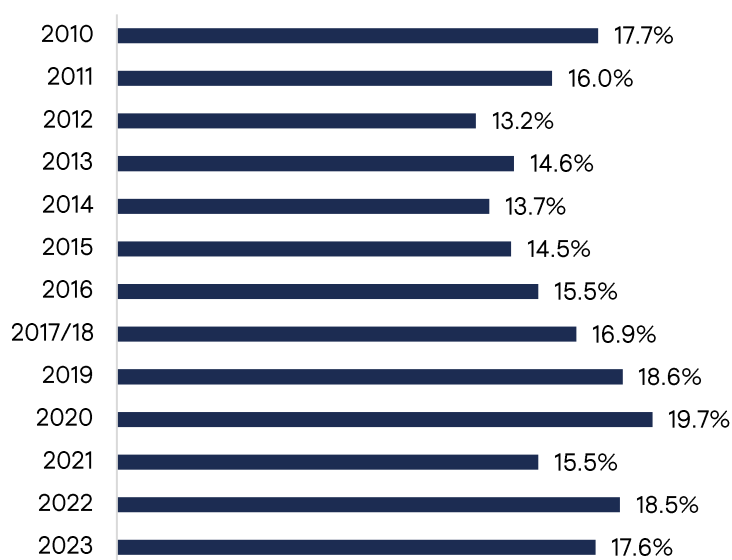
Children and young people as creators of poetry

While 1 in 4 (26.7%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 told us in 2023 that they read poetry in their free time, around 1 in 6 (17.6%, = 11,099) said that they wrote poetry in their free time at least once a month. Most (10.8%) of those who wrote poetry in their free time did so on paper, while 4.5% did so on screen. Only 2.0% of children and young people who told us that they wrote poetry in their free time did so both on paper and on screen.

Figure 8 shows the percentage of children and young people who said that they wrote poetry in their free time at least once a month over the past 13 years. After recording the lowest levels of children and young people writing poetry in their free time in 2012, levels then steadily increased until 2020 when we recorded the highest number of children and young people writing poetry. This was just before the first national lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Levels then decreased in 2021,

coinciding with the third national lockdown, before recovering in 2022, only to fall again somewhat in 2023. Indeed, levels are now comparable with those we saw 13 years ago.

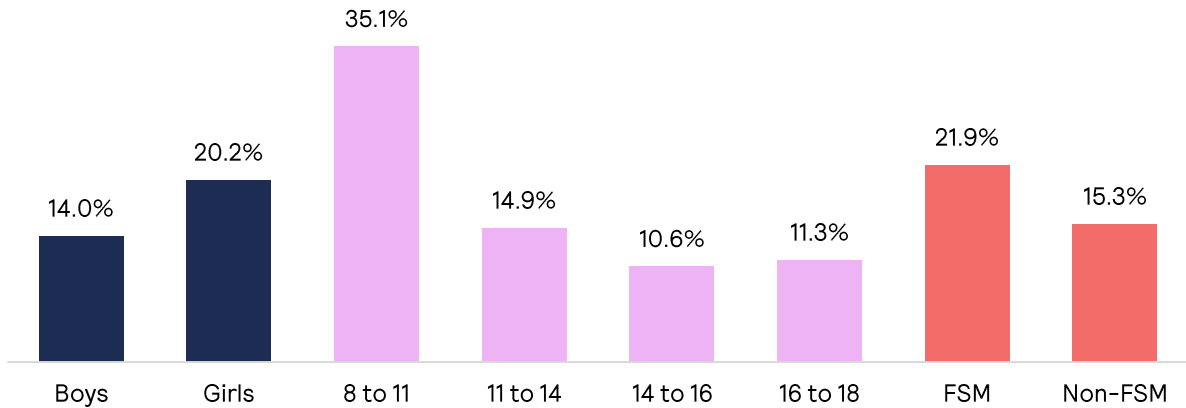
Figure 8: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who wrote poetry in their free time at least once a month between 2010 and 2023



Who are the children and young people who wrote poetry in 2023?

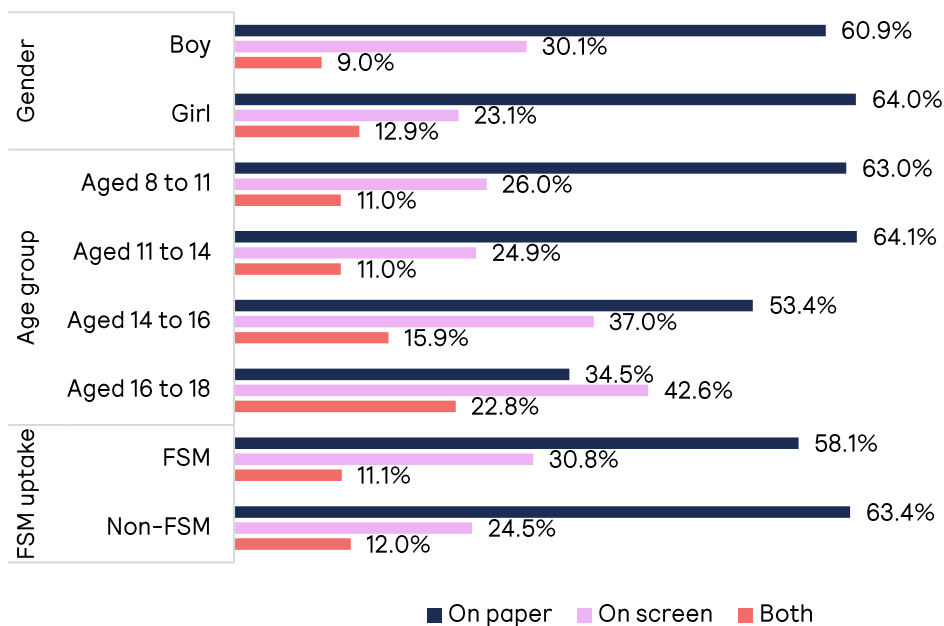
More girls than boys told us that they had written poetry in their free time, with over 1 in 5 girls saying this compared with 1 in 7 boys (see Figure 9). Poetry writing decreases as we move up the age groups, with over three times as many children aged 8 to 11 saying that they write poetry in their free time compared with those aged 14 to 18. As noted in our previous reports on poetry, more children and young people who received FSMs said they write poetry in their free time compared with those who didn't receive FSMs.

Figure 9: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who wrote poetry in their free time at least once a month by gender, key stage and FSM status in 2023



While most children and young people aged 8 to 18 who wrote poetry in their spare time did so on paper, regardless of their gender, age group or FSM uptake, Figure 10 highlights some interesting variations, particularly with regards to those aged 16 to 18. More of those aged 16 to 18 who told us that they wrote poetry in their free time did so on screen than on paper or across both media.

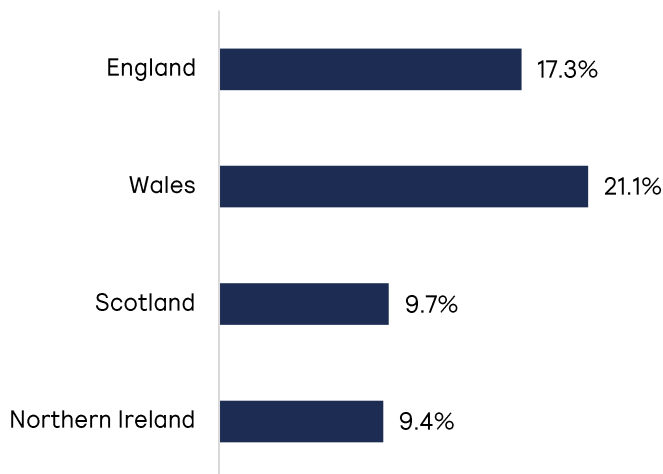
Figure 10: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 writing poetry on paper, on screen or across both formats in 2023 by gender, age group and FSM uptake



Children and young people writing poetry by geographical region

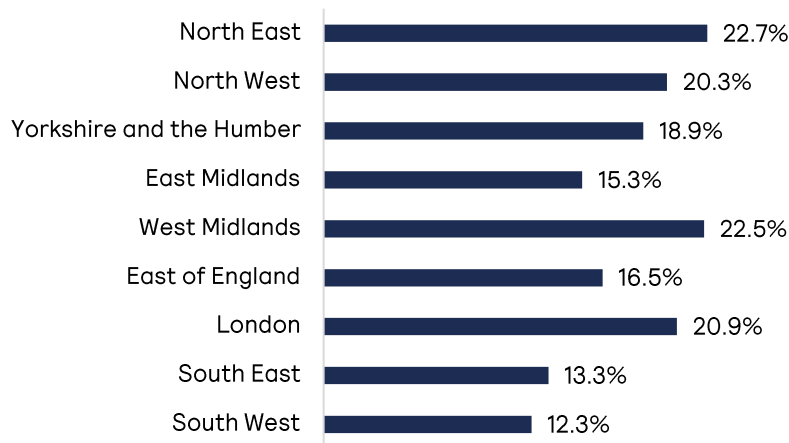
There were differences in whether children and young people were writing poetry in their free time depending on where they were in the country. As shown in Figure 11, more children and young people in Wales said that they wrote poetry in their free time, followed by those in England. Fewer children and young people in Scotland and Northern Ireland said that they wrote poetry in their free time. However, as before, the percentage for Northern Ireland needs to be treated with caution as only a small number of children and young people from NI took part in this year's survey.

Figure 11: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who wrote poetry in their free time in 2023 by UK nation



Differences in England are further broken down by region in Figure 12. It shows that more children and young people from the North East, West Midlands and Greater London said that they wrote poetry in their free time compared with their peers in other regions. The smallest percentage of children and young people who said that they wrote poetry in their free time came from the South East and the South West, which were also the regions with the fewest children and young people reading poetry in their free time.

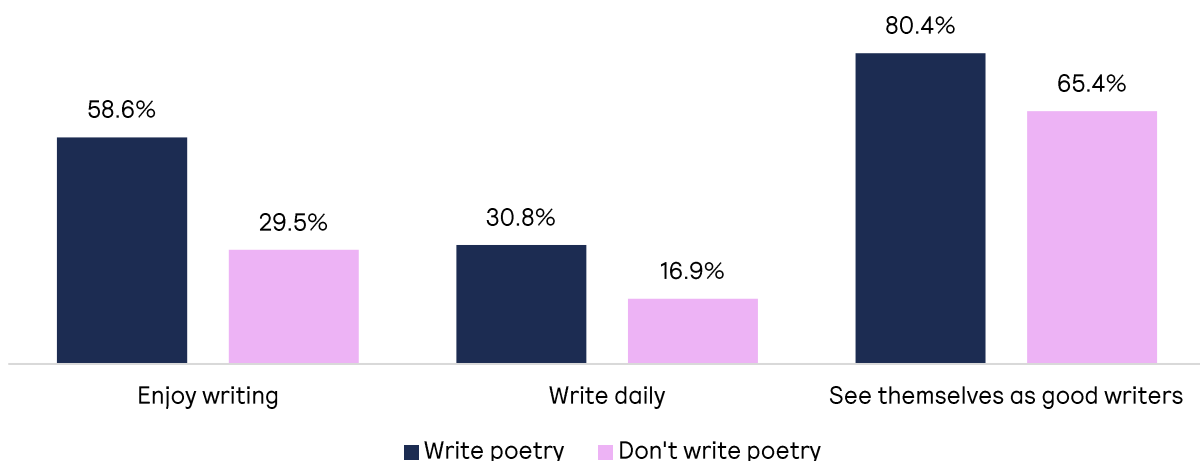
Figure 12: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who wrote poetry in their free time in 2023 by region in England



Writing poetry, writing enjoyment, writing frequency and writing confidence

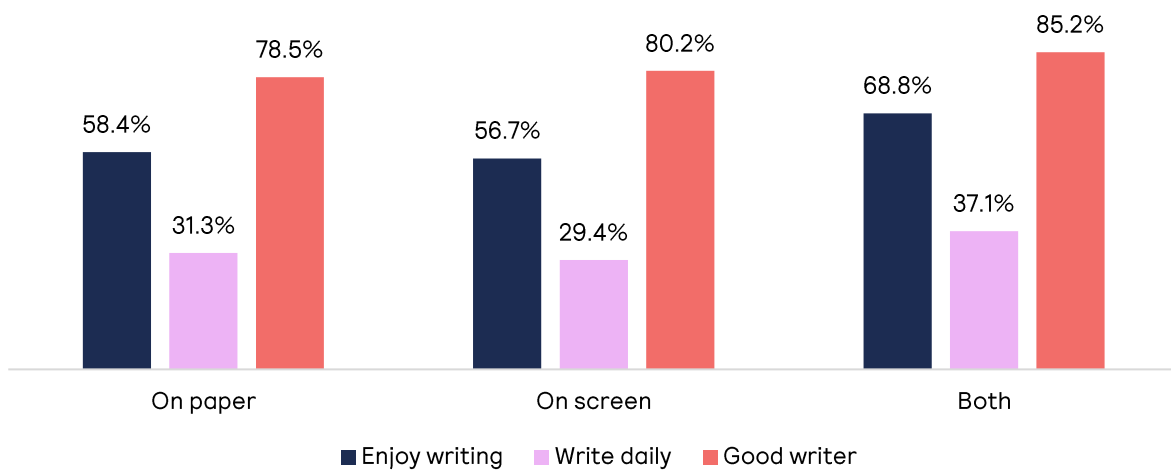
We were also interested in the general writing engagement of poetry writers compared with non-poetry writers. As shown in Figure 13, more children and young people who wrote poetry in their free time also said that they enjoyed writing in their free time compared with their peers who didn't write poetry in their free time. More also said that they wrote something daily, and more saw themselves as either very good or good writers.

Figure 13: Writing enjoyment, frequency and self-perceived writing skill of children and young people who wrote poetry in their free time compared with those who didn't in 2023



Looking at those who wrote poetry in their free time more closely, levels of writing enjoyment, daily writing and self-reported writing confidence are very similar between those who wrote poetry on paper and those who wrote it on screen (see Figure 14). However, as we already saw with reading, more of those who wrote poetry across both media reported the highest levels of enjoyment, daily writing and self-reported writing confidence.

Figure 14: Writing enjoyment, daily writing and self-reported writing skill by whether those who wrote poetry in 2023 did so on paper, on screen or on both media



Beyond reading, we were also interested in why children and young people wrote poetry. Through open-ended comments, the cohort shared that they often wrote poetry to support their wellbeing. Poetry helped children to process and express their emotions:

“Whenever I feel depressed, writing poems helps get what I’m feeling out and it lets other people know how I am feeling.” (I describe myself in a different way, Y9)

“Writing helps me to express my feelings e.g., when I’m upset, I write a poem instead of shouting all of my feelings out and it makes me feel a lot better.” (Girl, Y5)

“Writing poems helps me to understand myself.” (Girl, Y12)

“I have ADHD making it hard to focus on a book for long periods of time. I love writing poems to express my thoughts and emotions. I can talk about my feelings in debates and other social situations.” (Girl, Y8)

“[I write when I] have an idea I want to express how I feel or develop it and make it sound like a poem or a song.” (Girl, Y8)

“I write poems, song lyrics and journals because it makes me feel better.” (Girl, Y8)

A number of children and young people also told us they wrote poetry because they enjoyed the acts of writing and being creative:

“I like to write poems.” (Boy, Y4)

“I like doing loads of creative things so sometimes I want to randomly write a poem for fun.” (Girl, Y9)

“[...] I write creatively in my free time, especially poetry. I enjoy world-building and creating story outlines but I don't tend to finish long pieces.” (Genderfluid, Y9)

“I think poems and stories are really beautiful and creative.” (Girl, Y9)

“[...] yesterday in school we did an acrostic poem about the jabberwocky and I enjoyed it very much because it was a fun piece of writing and there's no right or wrong answer in writing your own poems, stories and many more. [...]” (Girl, Y7)

“I like writing poems and making it rhyme.” (Boy, Y7)

“Spend a lot of time songwriting. I really enjoy reading/writing and performing poetry.” (Girl, Y11)

“I do a lot of reading at home. I also write nonsensical rhyming poems when I'm really bored.” (Boy, Y8)

Beyond this, children also wrote to advance their aims and aspirations. Some children shared their writing to improve, while others did so because they wanted to join competitions or become poets in the future:

“I've had an interest in literature for most of my life. As a natural extent to this, I aspire to become an author and/or poet.” (Girl, Y7)

“I write poems for competitions within school to have a chance to be published in a book.” (Girl, Y8)

“Because in English I like to write a lot and I love [participating] in Poetry by Heart.” (Y5, Boy)

“I read all of the time. I usually practise writing poems or stories as I'd like to get better at writing descriptions and any type of writing styles.” (Girl, Y8)

“I adore writing. I try to practise it every day. I write short stories, poems, create worlds and characters and whole universes. It is one of my most treasured hobbies. I hope to become published one day. Writing is pretty much my life’s work and lifeblood.” (I would rather not say, Y9)

Some children and young people told us they wrote poetry because others inspired them:

“I enjoy writing poems with my nan because she writes poems too.” (Girl, Y9)

“Friends talking about poems [encourages me to write poetry].” (Boy, Y4)

“Seeing other people on TikTok writing poems and realising how much of a release poems can be when you load your feelings into them.” (Girl, Y8)

“Amazing people accomplishing things through writing stories, poems, and fact books.” (Girl, Y4)

Conversely, a handful of children said they wrote poetry to connect with, or perform to, others:

“[I write] to help people.” (Boy, Y4)

“I write poems for my mum.” (Girl, Y7)

“Sometimes I like writing poems, because that helps me connect and feel what others might feel about something or the world.” (Girl, Y7)

“I like performing my poems.” (Boy, Y8)

“I write poems for myself on occasion, sometimes for my girlfriend. I hate writing under time conditions.” (Boy, Y10)

“I write a lot of poetry about society and mental health in my free time that I post on social media.” (Girl, Y10)

On the other side, some children and young people did not like poetry. A handful of those who did not write poetry shared they chose not to write because they lacked inspiration, interest, didn’t feel good enough about their abilities or felt unable to be creative at school:

“I find myself quite interested in poetry though I don’t feel I’m very good at writing it, so I haven’t really attempted it. I wish I could though.” (Boy, Y11)

“I don’t write because I find it a bit boring to just sit there and write, for example, a poem. What would make me want to write is if it was a topic that I find interesting.”
(Boy, Y9)

“I would like to write a poem or something else, but I’m not very interested in it.”
(Girl, Y10)

“[...] I enjoy writing for pleasure, from journaling to creative writing or poetry. It’s how I cope with changes to my every day. English, for a really long time, was my safe haven. Before GCSEs that is. GCSE English sucked all joy from the language. Now I only write emails, essays or to gain marks.” (Girl, Y11)

“We don’t do much creative writing at school and instead we read poems and stuff and this is boring because we cannot produce our own work and we have to read other people’s stuff.” (Girl, Y8)

When readers of poetry are also writers of poetry

Are readers of poetry also writers of poetry? Our data suggest that there is a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.51$) between the two. Indeed, 1 in 2 (48.0%) children and young people who read poetry in their free time also told us that they wrote poetry in their free time compared with only 6.1% of those who didn’t read poetry in their free time. Indeed, many children and young people told us that they read poetry as it inspires them to write their own poems:

“Reading gives me ideas for poetry writing.” (Girl, Y8)

“Also, sometimes I think about writing a story or poems and reading helps me get more ideas.” (Boy, Y6)

“It inspires me to write my own poems and stories.” (Girl, Y7)

“I only read poems online for inspiration.” (Non-binary, Y8)

Supporting children and young people to engage with poetry

Over the last eight years, the National Literacy Trust has been running and developing Young Poets, a poetry programme that supports children and young people to engage with, and enjoy, poetry. Every school participating in Young Poets is provided with support to use our evidence-based three-pillar approach to writing to galvanise students' engagement with poetry.³ Young Poets' process of memorable experiences to help bring writing to life, lively guided discussions, collaborative and individual writing activities led by professional poets, and publishing and performing tasks, enable pupils to engage with literacy on their own terms in a way that also meets national curriculum requirements for writing.

Pupil insight

After taking part in the programme, pupils completed a survey to tell us about their experience with Young Poets. Of the 144⁴ respondents who took part in 2022/23, just under half 45.8% came from London, 23.6% from Nottingham, 16.7% from Blackpool and 13.9% from Bradford.

Looking generally at the experience of the programme, the school trip element and opportunity to write a poem about the trip was viewed positively (see Figure 15). 3 in 4 (75.7%) agreed that they liked being able to choose what they wrote about, and 2 in 3 (66.7%) felt creative when they wrote poems.

Additionally, many pupils seemed to enjoy the novelty of the poetry writing: more than half (53.2%) said the poetry they wrote as part of the school trip for Young Poets was better than the ways they had written poetry before, and just less than

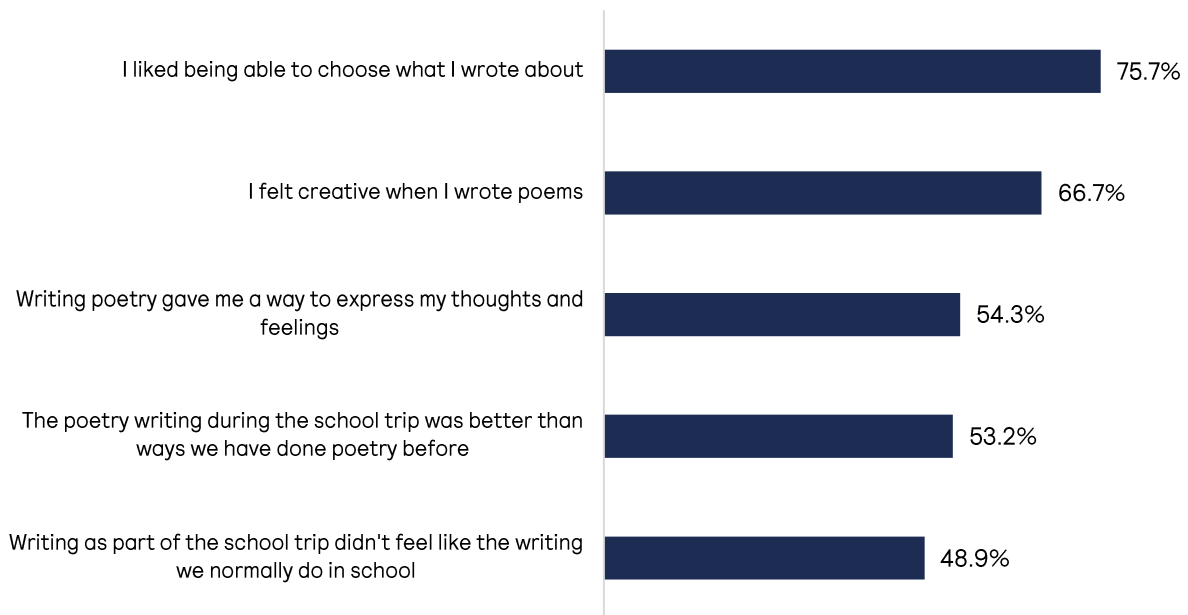
³ Our three pillars pedagogy includes:

1. **Memorable experiences** at local galleries, museums and heritage sites as a source of inspiration addressing the fact that 48% of children and young people see struggling with knowing 'what to write about' as a significant barrier to writing for pleasure
2. **Working with professional writers** to move away from students' routinised experiences of the writing process in school and towards enriching experiences of 'real' writing
3. **Real audience and purpose:** opportunities to increase students' motivation and pride in writing for publishing or/and performance

⁴ 49.6% (n = 69) girls, 37.4% (n = 52) boys, 1.4% (n = 2) described themselves another way and 11.5% (n = 16) chose not to tell us.

half (48.9%) agreed that writing as part of the school trip didn't feel like the writing they normally did at school.

Figure 15: Percentages of pupils who agreed with statements about Young Poets



Interestingly, pupils rated the programme highly for collaboration and teamwork. Indeed, some pupils shared that their favourite part was getting to work with others and hear their stories:

“I loved listening to everyone telling poems about their lives, experiences, city, and much more.” (Pupil, Bradford)

“My favourite part was that I could collaborate with others.” (Pupil, London)

“My favourite part was when we were put into groups and we performed.” (Pupil, Nottingham)

We also asked the pupils whether Young Poets had changed how often they engaged with poetry, how much they enjoyed poetry, and how confident they were in their ability to write poems. Starting with writing frequency, while 1 in 3 (34.3%) pupils told us that they wrote at least once a week before taking part in the programme, half (50.4%) said the same at the end of the programme. The percentage of those who told us that they wrote daily doubled over the course of the programme (6.6% vs 13.3%). Finally, 1 in 3 (34.8%) pupils told us that since taking part in the programme, they read more poems than before.

Listening to poems also became more positive over the course of the programme, with nearly half (46.0%) of pupils telling us that they enjoyed listening to poems more after taking part in Young Poets. Additionally, 2 in 5 (39.3%) told us that they enjoyed writing poetry more after taking part in Young Poets

Finally, 4 in 5 (83.8%) pupils told us that their poetry-writing skills had improved since taking part in Young Poets.

Looking at open-ended comments, some pupils felt that the school trip had directly contributed to changes in their poetry engagement:

“ [I enjoyed] looking at the building; the walk was inspirational. The speaker at Bronte Passage had lots of knowledge. The teachers have helped me understanding that poetry is not boring and helps feeling and emotions: I can express myself better.” (Pupil, Bradford)

“I liked the trip a lot because it taught me new things about writing and poetry, and it helped me understand more stuff about poetry and writing.” (Pupil, London)

Additionally, engaging with the professional poet was also impactful. 2 in 3 (68.6%) told us that working with a poet was ‘very good’ (34.7%) or ‘good’ (33.9%). Some pupils described the poet as inspiring:

“She was very good and inspiring!” (Pupil, London)

“Leanne [one of the poets] was very funny, and she was very inspiring!” (Pupil, Nottingham)

Teacher insight

Teachers (n = 31) were also invited to respond to a survey about their experience with taking part in Young Poets in their school. All (100%) said they would recommend the programme to other schools. 3 in 5 (61.3%) said it was ‘very valuable’ for their students and 2 in 5 (38.7%) said it was ‘quite valuable’. Telling us about their experience, teachers explained:

“I love this project – we have been involved for the past few years. The children really enjoy the process and are so proud to be published in an actual book. It helps build their enthusiasm for poetry. We find that it is a great leveller of ability as the children find it easier to be successful with poetry than they might be with a longer piece of writing.” (Teacher, Bradford)

“The professional poet was inspirational to the children. They loved hearing a local accent and being able to celebrate their own heritage growing up on their estate. They thrived being able to use a local voice and not the Standard English they have to use during most writing activities. They had more confidence to perform their poems with their own voice.” (Teacher, Bradford)

Conclusion

On this National Poetry Day, we want to draw attention to the small percentage of children and young people who told us in 2023, and indeed in previous years, that they write poetry in their free time. Our report strongly indicates that poetry writing supports children and young people’s mental wellbeing and helps them express feelings and struggles, escape reality and make sense of the complex events going on in our world. Poetry seems to encourage children and young people to see themselves as fully integrated human beings with a rich individual interior life that they are finally able to express through this dynamic form. Furthermore, children and young people demonstrated an appreciation of poetry’s power to provide social connections and sharing opportunities through performance, signalling a fundamental shift in perceptions. Finally, for those who invest time in poetry, we recorded greater confidence and belief in their reading and writing abilities.

These findings are even more crucial in light of a trend that we have recorded every year since 2010. Young people on free school meals are more likely to engage with poetry-writing in their free time than their more affluent peers. This highlights that poetry and the writing of poetry have a vital role to play in the lives of disadvantaged children and young people. It also delivers a clear mandate to support schools to develop poetry projects for their students in close collaboration with professional poets. Our previous research on the impact of author visits and the ongoing evaluation of our poetry programmes in fact provided some insight into the positive links between poet visits and radical shifts in reading and writing attitudes and behaviours. Ever-increasing pressures on school budgets, however, put access to such experiences beyond the reach of many schools, even though students have so much to gain from being exposed to ‘real writing’ through working with a professional poet.

The findings in this report examined alongside pre-recorded trends provide extensive evidence to inform coordinated inter-organisational and policy-defining action to improve the provision of in-school opportunities that bring the energy of contemporary poetry to the classroom and reconnect children and young people with the creative elements that transform poetry into a pleasurable, social and active practice rather than a solitary, rigorous and elitist subject.

At the National Literacy Trust, we will continue to collaborate with sister organisations and funders to support schools to explore and develop poetry-writing practices with the radical view that every young person is a poet.

About the National Literacy Trust

Our charity is dedicated to improving the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of those who need it most, giving them the best possible chance of success in school, work and life. We run Literacy Hubs and campaigns in communities where low levels of literacy and social mobility are seriously impacting people's lives. We support schools and early years settings to deliver outstanding literacy provision, and we campaign to make literacy a priority for politicians, businesses and parents. Our research and analysis make us the leading authority on literacy and drive our interventions.

Literacy is a vital element of action against poverty and our work changes life stories.

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