



Helping teachers work with children when they first return to school following major traumatic or life-changing events

Superpower Poetry Fun

by Dr Selina Tusitala Marsh

Rhyming My Why

We all have a 'why'. Knowing it is key to our wellbeing. The next set of poetry exercises helps students figure out their 'why' in a creative, playful way by making poems.

What makes you happy? What are your non-negotiables for happiness? What's your superpower? These sets of exercises will give you a clearer idea of how to complete the following 'Why' affirmation:

'In everything I do, I believe in...' (Simon Sinek)

E.g. One of mine is: 'In everything I do, I believe in the power of beauty, wonder and laughter to create connection.'

POEM 1: Rhyming my What

This exercise helps you figure out what makes you tick by identifying the things around you that make you happy or that are significant for you in particular ways. These objects are windows into the house of you.

Aim: To write a 20 lined list poem about yourself.

1. Read my poem below out loud (1970s).
2. Have students identify how the poem works by answering the following questions [answers in brackets]:
 - a. How many sentences per line? [2 short sentences per line.]
 - b. What general rhyming pattern is followed? [The end of each sentence rhymes with the next.]
 - c. What word is repeated throughout the poem? What effect does it have? ['My'. Repetition creates a rhythm that anchors the many different items that appear in the list poem.]
 - d. What kinds of objects are mentioned in the poem? [Trees, people, games, clothes, toys, actions, wishes, desires, books, movies, physical descriptions, things said.]
3. Write your own list poem using this same formula.



Tips:

- Use items that you love or have been significant in your life.
- Draw on your culture and if you can, use words from that culture, ie, lavalava is a Samoan form of clothing.
- Title your poem with something that your items have in common. It might be the year/s you had them, how old you were at the time, or the place you experienced them.
- Use specific, vivid and detailed language. For example, 'pohutukawa' is a stronger description than 'tree'; 'lavalava' is stronger than 'clothing'.
- Use mostly objects but throw in defining actions ('smashing mum's cabinet') and things you used to say ('You little snitch' -- I used to say this to my little sister who told on me to my mum all the time).
- Use contrasting imagery. For example, 'Morris minor' (a type of car) is big, whereas 'egg timer' is small, but both 'move'.
- Read your poem OUT LOUD.
- Have fun!

1970s

My pohutukawa. My Lyn of Tawa.
My Pam Eyres. My monopoly shares.
My lavalava. My mother.
My stainless steel slide. My go and hide.
My smashing mum's cabinet. My wanting a rabbit.
My terrarium. My axolotl aquarium.
My Bad Jelly the Witch. My *You little snitch*.
My Mary Poppins umbrella roof jump. My sister's back thump.
My Morris Minor. My egg timer.
My painting houses. My killing mice.
My blackboard teaching. My Baptist preaching.
My skipping rope. My endless hope.
My Salvation Army clothes. My running nose.
My Avondale Spiders. My low rider.
My first ever letter from Ms Fish. My Christmas wish.
My *Yes, I can*. My brother Luka and sister Sam.
My *Yes, I will*. My bitter pill.
My wrongin', my rightin'. My Enid Blyton.
My mophead of hair. My *I don't care!*



Helping teachers work with children when they first return to school following major traumatic or life-changing events

POEM 2: I Am

Your list of treasured, memorable things and actions say a lot about who you are and *why* you are.

Quickly choose the 10 'best' objects and/or phrases from your poem. Go on your gut feeling. Write them below, for example:

1. Pohutukawa
2. Pam Eyres
3. Stainless steel slide
4. Bad Jelly the Witch book
5. You little snitch
6. Mary Poppins
7. Avondale Spiders
8. First ever letter
9. Mophead of hair
10. I don't care

Now, next to each item, write down the qualities that appeal to you (it's ok if the same qualities attract you to different items). Keep your reasons short.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Pohutukawa | long-limbed, sheltering |
| 2. Pam Eyres | she was a poet who was funny, made poetry accessible |
| 3. Stainless steel slide | dad made this, one of a kind, I used to stare into my reflection |
| 4. Bad Jelly the Witch book | one of a kind (author illustrated), justice served |
| 5. <i>You little snitch</i> | loyalty more important than being right |
| 6. Mary Poppins | one of a kind, did things her own way |
| 7. Avondale Spiders | junk shop, a space of wonder and curiosity |
| 8. First ever letter from Ms Fish | made me feel beautiful and that I belonged |
| 9. Mophead of hair | makes me one of a kind, symbol of my difference |
| 10. I don't care | not afraid to be me |

Write a 10-lined poem mostly using the lines from above. Each line must begin with 'I am...'
If there are repeated qualities, make sure it gets repeated or specific mention in your poem (see 'one of a kind' below). Use what is repeated the most as your title.

For example,

One of a kind

I am a pohutukawa, long-limbed and sheltering



Helping teachers work with children when they first return to school following major traumatic or life-changing events

I am Pam Eyres, funny, making poetry accessible
I am a stainless slide, one of a kind, I stare at me
I am the book, Bad Jelly, the Witch, made from original lines
I am 'you little snitch', loyalty above all else
I am Mary Poppins, one of a kind, doing things my way
I am Avondale Spiders, a shop full of wonder and curiosity
I am the first ever letter from Ms Fish, I am beautiful and I belong
I am Mophead, one of a kind, different
I am I don't care, I'm not afraid to be me.

POEM 3: My Why Graphic Poem

Taking your 'I Am' poem, highlight the qualities that most appeal to you.

I am a pohutukawa, long-limbed and sheltering
I am Pam Eyres, **funny**, making poetry accessible
I am a stainless slide, **one of a kind**, I stare at me
I am the book, Bad Jelly, the Witch, made **from original** lines
I am 'you little snitch', loyalty above all else
I am Mary Poppins, one of a kind, doing things my way
I am Avondale Spiders, a shop full **of wonder and curiosity**
I am the first ever letter from Ms Fish, I **am beautiful and I belong**
I am Mophead, one of a kind, different
I am I don't care, **I'm not afraid** to be me.

Complete the following Why statement using the qualities above that you most identify with and love. Try writing several versions:

'In everything I do, I believe in...being one of a kind, funny, and original.'
'In everything I do, I believe in...loyalty, wonder, and curiosity'
'In everything I do, I believe in...beauty, belonging and not afraid to be me.'

These statements contain your superpowers. When you embrace these qualities, you are unstoppable! Yay! Create a graphic poem to remind you of your superpowers every day. Leaving out the ellipsis (...), choose one Why statement that rings the truest. Illustrate it with images from your 'I Am' Poem. You are not simply illustrating your words, you are using images that have special power and meaning and history in your own life – they are visual portals to your superpower.

See example on following page



Acknowledgements: The 'Rhyming My What' exercise was inspired by Bill Manhire's 'Rhyming the Past' in *The Exercise Book* (Victoria University Press). My thanks to Dr Pala Molisa for kōrero about Why statements (<https://www.soulworks.co.nz/>).