

## ENCOURAGING NEW POEMS

### NEW POEMS, NEW DIRECTIONS

Poems beget poems. The more poems you write, the more you will find waiting to be written. So when you hit a rich vein, don't rest after you've finished your first draft and put it aside to mature. Keep hammering away at the wordface.

Ted Hughes believed that poem sequences are a good way of generating new poetry, particularly during a creative dry spell. Sometimes you sit down to write something new and the words won't come. Linking poems together can help to maintain the momentum of previous inspiration.

Even if you tend only to write stand-alone poems that arrive at intervals, make an exception this time. Set out deliberately to write a sequel to the poem you have just finished. Or a prequel, if you prefer.

### EXERCISE: WRITING SEQUELS

Take a recently-finished poem. Write a new poem based on your previous poem by using:

1. Key or favourite phrases from the original that suggest new directions
2. Thematic links: i.e. a poem about apples may suggest the colours green or red, forbidden fruit, adultery, a woman's body, fertility, creativity, spirituality, the tree of life, even gravity
3. Narrative continuation: move on to the next level or stage
4. Variation on a theme: write the poem again from a different perspective
5. The same characters: can they live again in a new poem?
6. Story groupings: look for ways to expand an idea, theme or approach. If you've written a poem linked to a fairy tale, are there other tales you can explore? Some poets write whole collections based around water, fire, love, betrayal, etc.

### PREQUELS AND BRIDGING POEMS

Occasionally you will write a poem and find an 'earlier' poem pressing on your mind. This is a prequel. It leads into the original poem and prepares the ground for it.

Bridging poems are similar. In narrative or other sequences, it's not always clear which poems should be placed in which order. You may find a 'gap' in your sequence or collection, where two different phases in your writing refuse to fit smoothly together. That's where a bridging poem tends to be most useful.

It's common only to find the need to write prequels or bridging poems right at the end of the process. It may seem calculating to write a poem for a particular purpose but all poems are a gift.

Don't stop at one or two new poems. Keep writing if it feels like the beginning of a sequence. The glory of spinning new ideas off previous poems is precisely that it encourages you to write more.

### EXERCISE: PREQUELS

Take a finished poem that feels as though it may have a rich backstory. Write a prequel in the following ways:

1. For a poem about a place, write a 'journey' poem to get there.
2. For a poem about an object, describe how you found the object or its provenance.
3. For a poem about a person or character, write their earlier life story or tell us what they were doing before the original poem began.
4. For a short descriptive poem, look at the first few lines. What might have come before them if the poem had not started there? Develop backwards.

The closing date for the Mslexia Poetry Competition is 18 July 2011. For more information, visit the website ([www.mslexia.co.uk](http://www.mslexia.co.uk)), email us at [poetry@mslexia.co.uk](mailto:poetry@mslexia.co.uk) or call us on 0191 233 3860.