

**Manchester  
City of Literature**

# **Real Contentment: A KS2 Schools Resource Pack for Chinese New Year and beyond**

Includes the chance for your pupils' work to be  
exhibited during the Festival of Libraries in June 2025

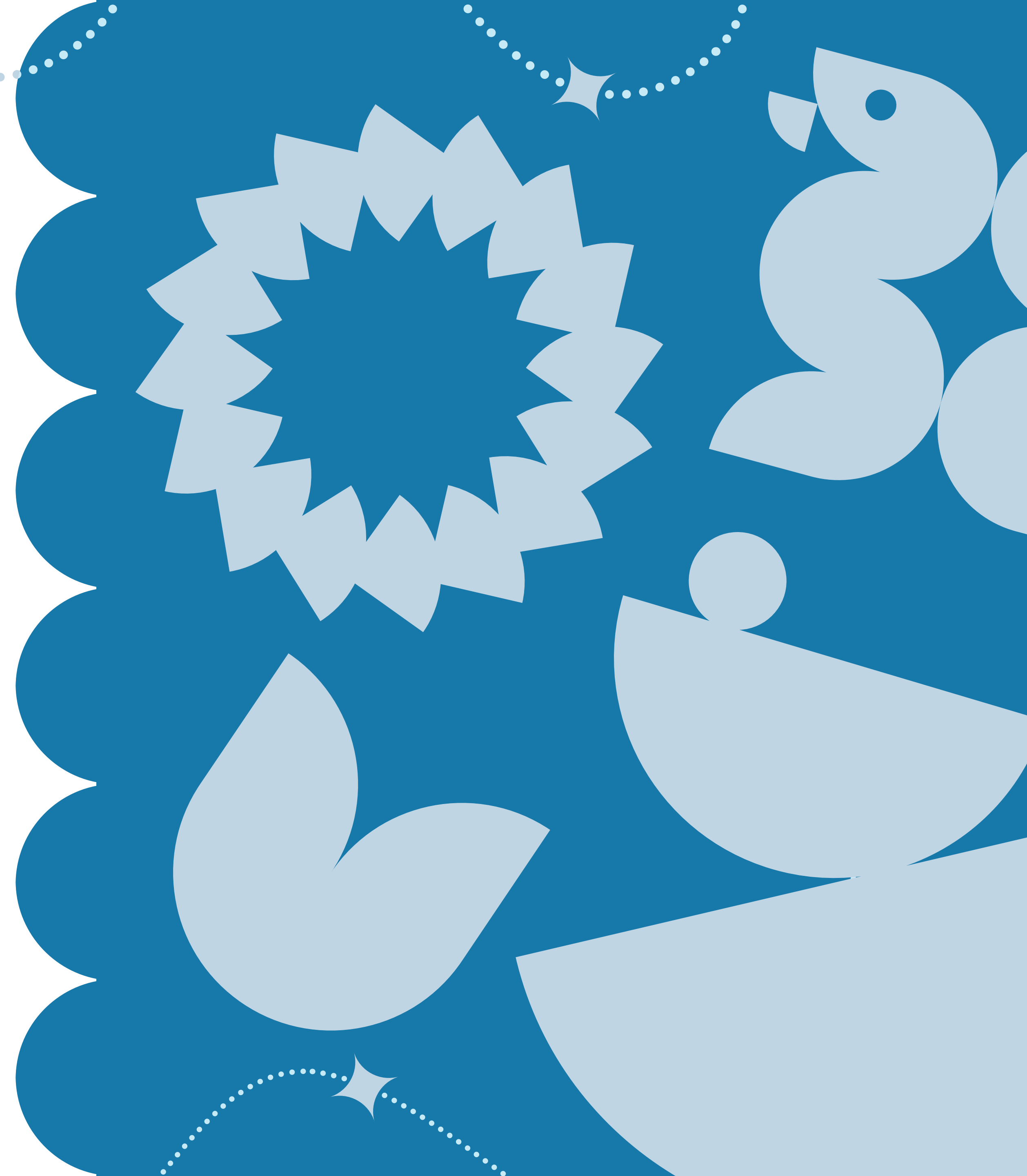
#MCRNJExchange  
Chinese New Year 2025  
[manchestercityofliterature.com](http://manchestercityofliterature.com)



Funded by



Contentment is funded by the British Council's International Collaboration Grants, which are designed to support UK and overseas organisations to collaborate on international arts projects.



# Poetry, Drama and Art Exchange During Chinese New Year: A Teaching Resource

Manchester and Nanjing, both UNESCO Cities of Literature and UNESCO Cities of Lifelong Learning, have launched Real Contentment, an artist exchange programme. This 9-month project aims to create a lasting partnership between the UK and Chinese cities – their artists, schools and creative communities. Activities will culminate in the Festival of Libraries, an annual celebration in June of Greater Manchester’s 133 libraries.

As part of this international exchange programme, we are keen to facilitate exchange between different age groups in our communities. We are inviting pupils aged 7-11 (Years 3-6) to create poetry, dramatic work or artwork related to the ecological theme of Real Contentment or cultural exchange. Selected pupil works will be exhibited in June 2025 during the Manchester Festival of Libraries.

[Information sheet](#) on how to submit pupils’ work.  
[Online form](#) to submit pupils’ work.

We have timed this part of the project with Chinese New Year, also known as Lunar New Year or Spring Festival, China’s most important festival. It is also the liveliest celebration for Chinese families around the world, as we experience every year in Manchester’s Chinatown.

We have developed some exercises, as well as plenty of additional ideas and resources, for you to guide pupils through their creative process. Literature and art can be a wonderful way to facilitate cultural exchange and expand pupils’ global perspectives. We hope this resource will spark your class’ imagination and curiosity. We look forward to your pupils’ creations!

Anita Ngai - Manchester City of Literature

.....

**Content:** Devjani Bodepudi | [@devjanibodepudi](#)

**Design:** Jake Haslam | [jakehaslam.design@gmail.com](mailto:jakehaslam.design@gmail.com)

**Editor:** Anita Ngai | [@anita.ngai](#)

Big thank you to Kaye Tew at the Manchester Poetry Library.





# Celebration Time!

As part of this year's celebrations for Chinese New Year, Manchester and Nanjing, both UNESCO Cities of Literature, are inviting children to create! We want their poetry, art and originality for themes related to China, cultural exchange and/or the natural world.

Pupils could be inspired by the Year of the Snake, the story of the Great Race or perhaps they would like to focus on the environment. They might even be inspired to tell stories about their own City of Manchester.

This pack is designed to work as Teacher's Notes and contains a list of websites and resources you may find helpful to share. It is also available as a PowerPoint for you to use in the classroom to adapt as necessary.

# Pupils' work can be inspired by any of the following themes

The following pages contain these exercises and prompts organised by the project themes:



## **1** Ecological theme of 'Real Contentment'

Respond to an extract from the poem 'Let Me Describe The Rainstorm' by Han Dong through shape poems such as those in Liz Brownlee's book *From Apes to Zebras*.



## **2** Chinese New Year

- a. Learn about the Chinese Zodiac by watching a shadow puppet video.
- b. Write an acrostic poem about the Year of the Snake in 2025, taking inspiration from the poem 'Adder' by Roy MacFarlane from his book *The Lost Words*.



## **3** Where I live: Manchester

Take inspiration from riddle poems about places by Kirsty Pelling and create work to show the city, culture and lives of Greater Manchester to pupils in Nanjing.

**1**

**Ecological theme of  
'Real Contentment'**



# Read

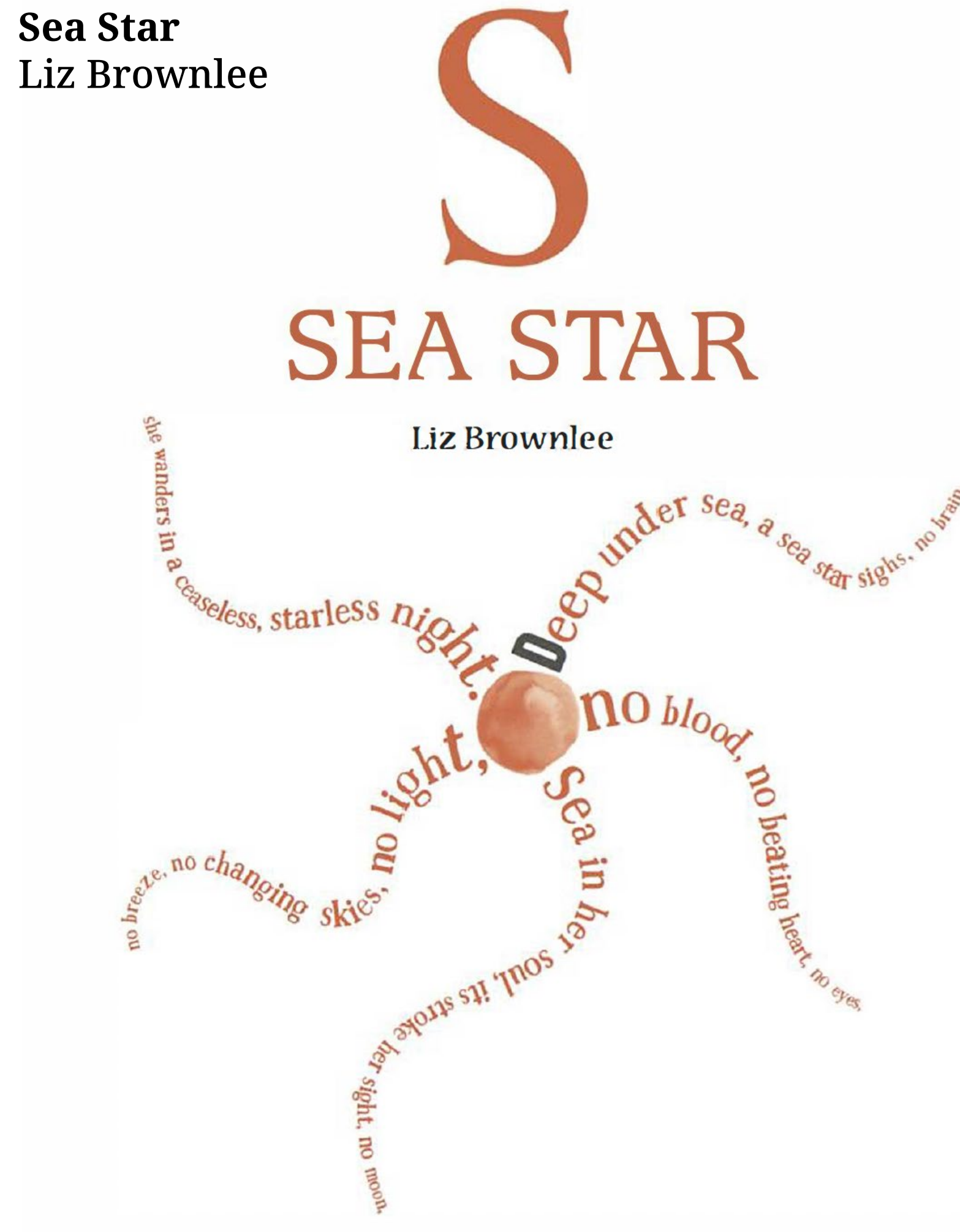
From **Let Me Describe the Rainstorm**  
Han Dong, translated by Nicky Harman

*...Real contentment comes  
With a ray of sunlight  
Shining in a woodland glade...*

See appendix for full poem

[Link for more shape poems here](#)

**Sea Star**  
Liz Brownlee



**The Song Thrush**  
Liz Brownlee



.....

## Share

The quote is from a poem by Han Dong (see Appendix for full poem). It was chosen because of its reference to nature and the relationship between contentment and our environment.

Ask pupils to think of places in nature that they may go to find peace or contentment. Play them YouTube clips of mindful nature content, like bird song, moving through woods or the sound of rain. If you can, let pupils feel the roughness of bark, the tickle of a blade of grass, the warmth of the sun (if you find any!). Ask pupils to make a list of things they can see, hear, touch, taste and smell. They will be writing a poem about one aspect of nature and how it makes them feel inside.

Finally come back as a class and ask pupils to share their ideas with each other.

.....

## Write

Pupils will now write a poem with all the ideas they have shared. Read Liz Brownlee's poems *Sea Star* and *The Song Thrush* from her book, *From Apes to Zebras*.

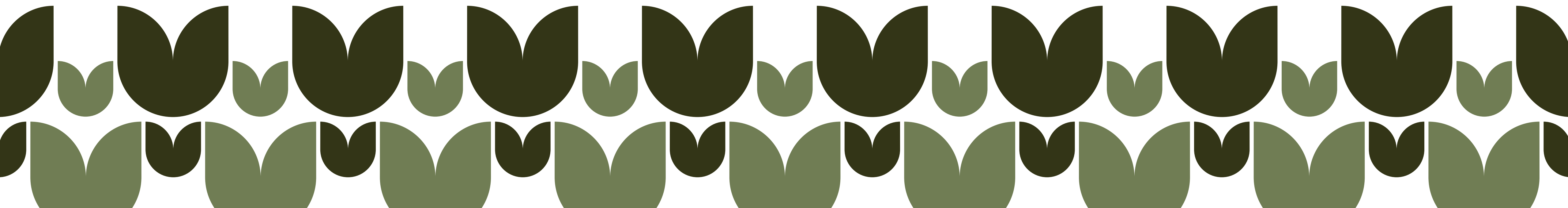
Recap the use of figurative language such as similes and metaphors. Can they use alliteration and onomatopoeia to describe one aspect of nature? Share examples on the board for the class to use in their writing.

Discuss how there are different kinds of poems: for example, they don't have to rhyme or if pupils choose, they can fill a shape with words, creating a shape poem or a concrete poem, like Brownlee's poems.

.....

## Illustrate

Here pupils can use their power of observation, like in the lines from Han Dong's poem or in Liz Brownlee's shape poems, to examine closely the idea of an animal or contentment. They can photograph, draw, paint or illustrate something in minute detail. It could be the swirls of their own fingerprints or the veins of a fallen leaf or the fur of a pet animal. How close can they get? How does this image convey contentment?





## Other prompts about the Ecological theme of Real Contentment

- Ask pupils to reflect on what is ‘real contentment’ for them. If it is ‘a ray of sunlight shining in a woodland glade’ for Han Dong, what is it for the pupil? Write a poem or create art to describe their version of ‘Real Contentment’.
- Ask pupils to reflect on ‘a ray of sunlight shining in a woodland glade’. Does it also bring ‘real contentment’ for them as it does for Han Dong? What feelings do they get from such rays of sunlight or from spending time in nature in general? Write a poem to describe or create art to demonstrate these feelings.





2

Chinese  
New Year



# Watch and Listen

This is a short CBBC video telling the story of the Great Race, the origin of the Chinese Zodiac. It is made using shadow puppets against a coloured background.





.....

## Share

This video is a great one to introduce pupils to the story of the Great Race, if they haven't heard it before.

### Think-Pair-Share

- Can they tell each other the story?
- What is their favourite animal?
- In groups of 2, 3 or 4 ask pupils to choose an animal.
- What are the key physical characteristics of this animal?
- How does their animal move?
- What sounds does it make?
- What personalities do they have? Are they jealous, strong, humble? How did they feel on winning or losing the race?

Finally, come back and ask pupils to share their ideas as a class.

.....

## Write

Pupils can be as creative as they choose. They can use the ideas to write a poem about their chosen animal and describe its physical features. They could create a dialogue or a short play that presents an alternative version of the Great Race or focuses on just a few of the characters from the original story.

Encourage pupils to share their work and critique kindly. What are two things they really like about each other's work? What's one thing they could change and how?

.....

## Illustrate

The video is made with shadow puppets against a reddish-orange sunset background. The shadow puppets are made using silhouettes of animal shapes cut out from black card or paper, with cut-out shapes within them to create an interesting image.

Watch the video and discuss the idea of shadows and how they block out the light. When we stand against the sun, all that can be seen is a silhouette; all the details are lost. You might want to discuss the colour gradient used in the background. Did they notice how the colours change from top to bottom?

Ask pupils to create their own silhouettes of an animal from the Great Race using their imagination. They can paste their silhouette against a colourful background of their choice. Perhaps they can use photography or collage to create an image inspired by the story and the idea of shadows and silhouettes.





# 2025: Year of the Snake

29 January 2025, the first day of Chinese New Year, marks the start of the Year of the Snake!

To evoke the snake spirit, here's an acrostic poem by Robert MacFarlane from his book *The Lost Words*, illustrated by Jackie Morris.

## adder

by Robert MacFarlane

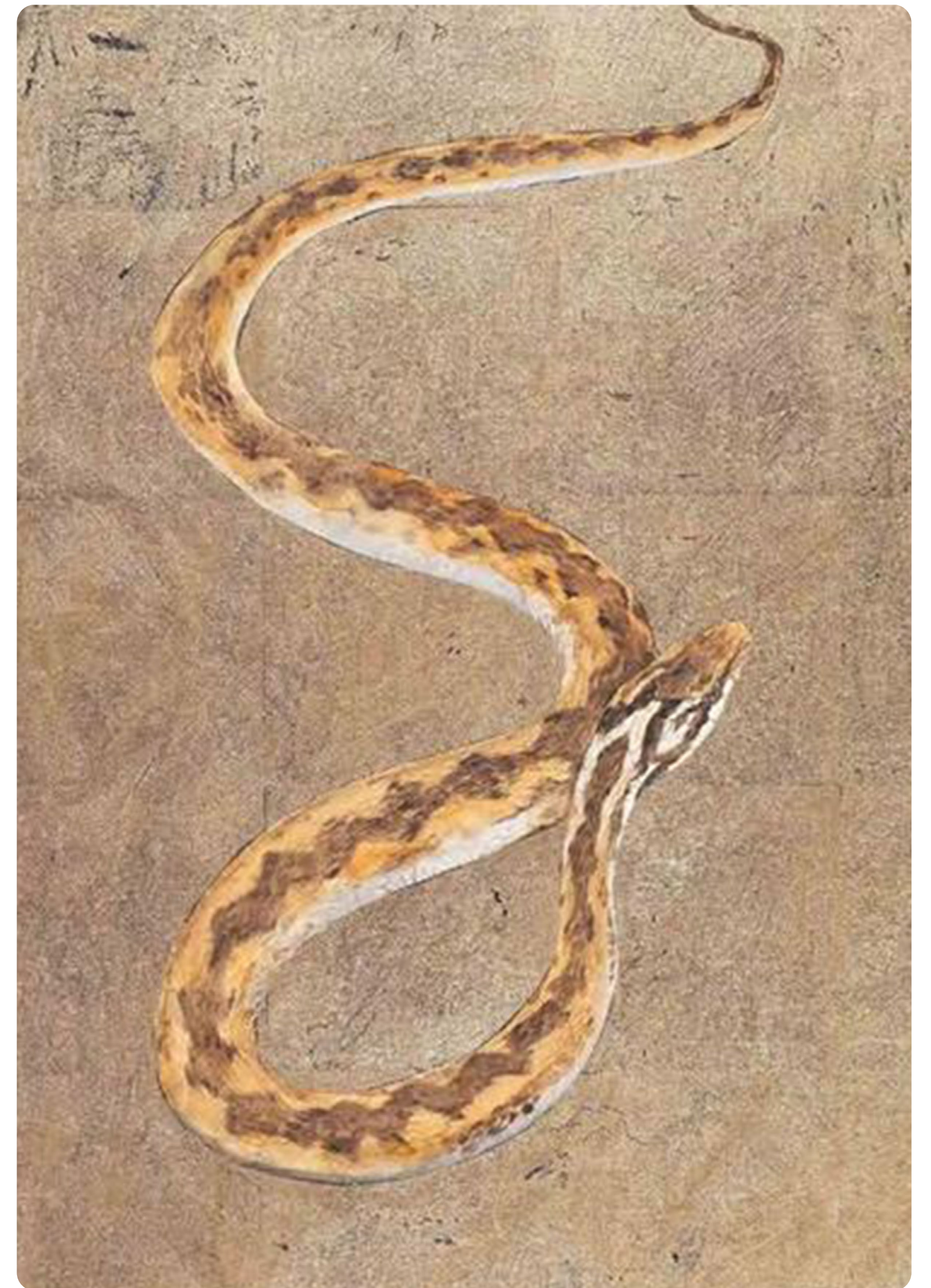
A hank of rope in the late hot sun; a curl  
of bark; a six, an eight:  
*For adder is as adder basks.*

Deep in heather, coiled in gorse, sunk among  
the winter stones:  
*For adder is as adder hides.*

Darts, diamond slides, sine-wave swerves,  
live-wire curves of force:  
*For adder is as adder glides.*

Echo of snake, self-escape, a left-behind ghost:  
*For adder is as adder sheds.*

Rustle of grass, sudden susurrus, what  
the eye misses:  
*For adder is as adder hisses.*



Illustrated by Jackie Morris



.....

# Share

This poem is a great one to read out loud, with all the sounds and movement, but it's also a great one to look and examine at text level.

Make sure each pupil has access to the poem in front of them. A teacher or confident reader should read the poem once out loud and then again with all pupils joining in.

Afterwards, ask pupils in groups of 2, 3 or 4, to highlight and list everything they notice about the poem and/or how the illustration matches or does not match what the poem describes. Give them about 5 minutes to do this and then come back and share their findings as a class.

Back in their groups, pupils can start thinking about crafting their work:

- Can they think of another animal to write about/illustrate?
- Make a list of all the animals they could use.
- What words can they associate with those creatures?
- Are there any examples of onomatopoeia or sibilance they could use to describe how the animals move or the sounds they make?

Finally, pupils should come back and share their findings with the rest of the class.



.....

## Write

The class should now have a good assortment of raw ingredients for their own poems.

MacFarlane's acrostic poem uses the beginning of every stanza, not every line, to form the word 'adder', a type of snake. Talk to pupils about what a stanza and a line in a poem are:

- What do they think about the acrostic form?
- What words do they think work really well in the poem and why?
- Are there words they don't understand?
- Did they notice the repetition at the end of each stanza?  
'For adder is as adder...'
- Looking at the final stanza, why do they think the poet used the words he did?

Ask pupils to choose an animal from their list to produce a mind-map with all the words and phrases they would like to use in their acrostic poems. They can use the letters of their animal to start either each stanza or each line; a short word such as 'dog' can be used to start each stanza, whereas a longer word such as 'rooster' can be used to start each line.

When they are happy with this, they can move onto creating their poem. Encourage pupils to edit their work.

.....

## Illustrate

The illustration by Jackie Morris is quite striking, using a plain gold background with a beautifully, detailed painting of a snake. It's done with gold leaf and not painted, while the snake sits on top.

Ask pupils what they notice about the background.

Ask pupils what other backgrounds or prints might work with an animal of their choice. They could use wallpaper samples, washi tape or a plain painted background in a single colour.

Ask pupils to paint, collage or craft their animal in any way they choose. If their animal is a sculpture or in 3D, can they take a photograph of it? Can they use photography or other technology to create their background, for example as a series of repeated images or a pattern using a Paint program online? The only requirement should be that their animal is visible against the background.



## Other prompts about Chinese New Year

- Find out what zodiac year the pupils were born in. Write a poem or create art based on that animal. Does the pupil feel they are similar or different in personality compared to that animal?
- 2024 was the year of dragon and 2025 the year of snake - write a poem or a short play or create art based on this change of the zodiac animal. Pupils should be encouraged to freely imagine how this switch happens.
- What other elements of the Chinese New Year are interesting to pupils? Have they experienced Chinese New Year foods, dragon dance or red pockets? Write a poem or create art based on those experiences.



3

Where I live:  
Manchester



# Explore and Discover

## Where I live: Manchester

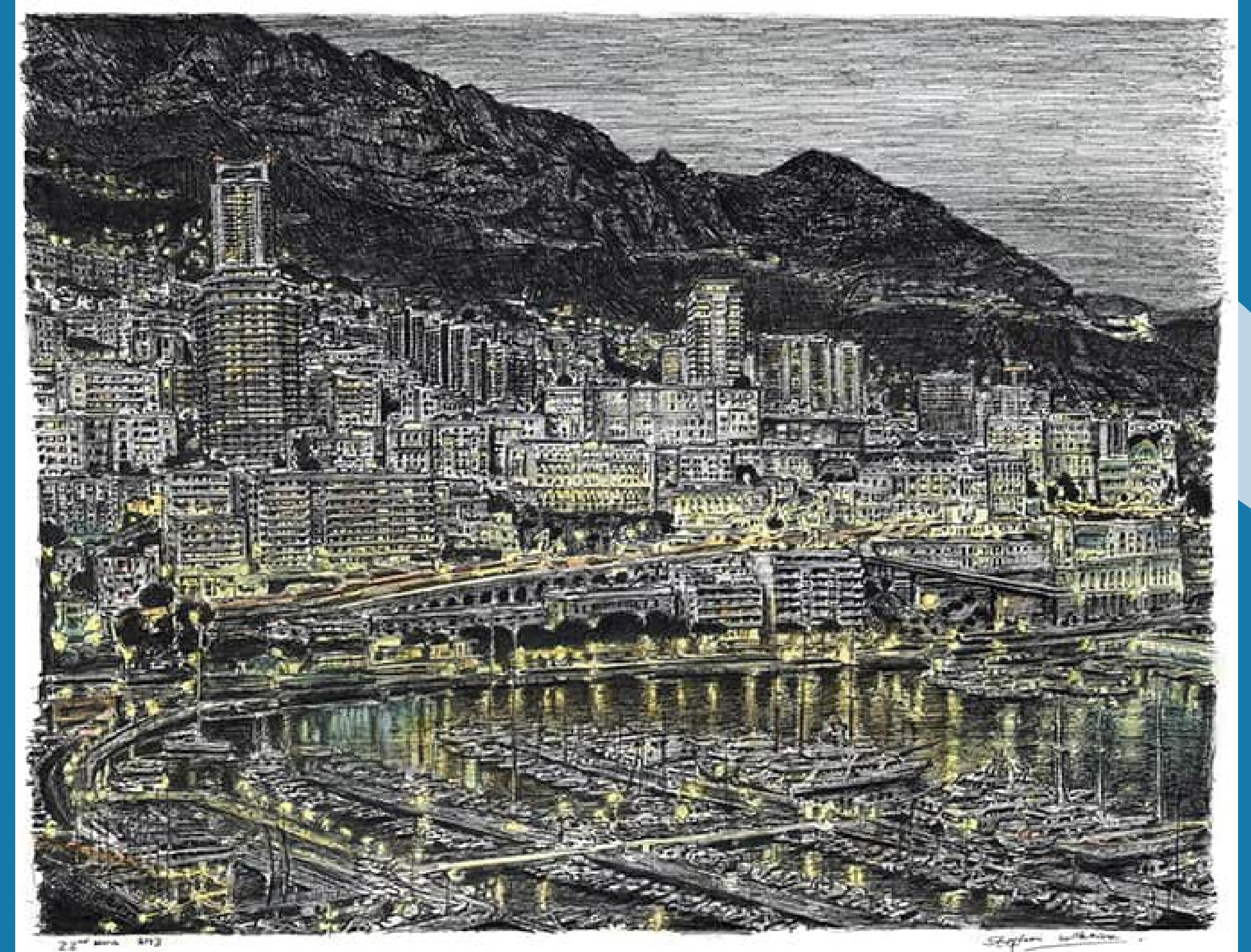
A shard of glass stabs skywards, several footie pitches high.  
Can you guess where I am standing, in the blinking of an eye?  
The power of this location strikes precisely once an hour  
while royal diamonds twinkle from a raven laden tower.  
This city is a game of Monopoly. So tell me, where am I?

**Answer: London**

I see a steely tower lighting up the bedtime sky.  
High on medieval cathedral I meet evil gargoyle's eye.  
I take a bike ride Seine-side, and glide past Bateaux Mouches.  
I slide flaky half-moon pastries into my bouche  
in pretty city patisseries. So tell me where am I?

**Answer: Paris**

All poems by Kirstie Pelling  
[More 'Where Am I' poems by Kirstie here](#)



*Light It Up* By Stephen Wiltshire.  
This 2013 drawing of Monte Carlo  
shows the city illuminated at night.  
[More of his drawings here](#)

.....

## Share

With the class, read the two riddle poems describing London and Paris.

In groups of 2 or 3, ask pupils to pick out distinguishing features or landmarks of the places described in the poems, e.g. the River Seine or the ‘raven laden tower’.

Now ask them to think about Manchester and what they want to tell their peers in Nanjing, who most likely have not visited the UK. Are there places or landmarks in Manchester they could talk about?

For added interest or pupils up for a challenge, can they think of unique, metaphoric ways to describe these places, e.g. Paris’ ‘flaky half-moon pastries’, i.e. croissants?

Invite pupils to share their ideas for a class list that they can refer to later.

Now ask pupils to make a list of place adverbials, such as ‘over there’ or ‘near the stadium’. They can use these to start lines in their poem.

.....

## Write

Pupils will now write a poem describing the City of Manchester, or where they live in Greater Manchester, for pupils in Nanjing. They may choose to start their poem with ‘Where I live...’.

Encourage pupils to use their list of place adverbials or local landmarks and features to write a poem. Each new line could be a new feature.

.....

## Illustrate

Ask pupils to pick a landmark or distinguishing feature local to Manchester or where they live in Greater Manchester.

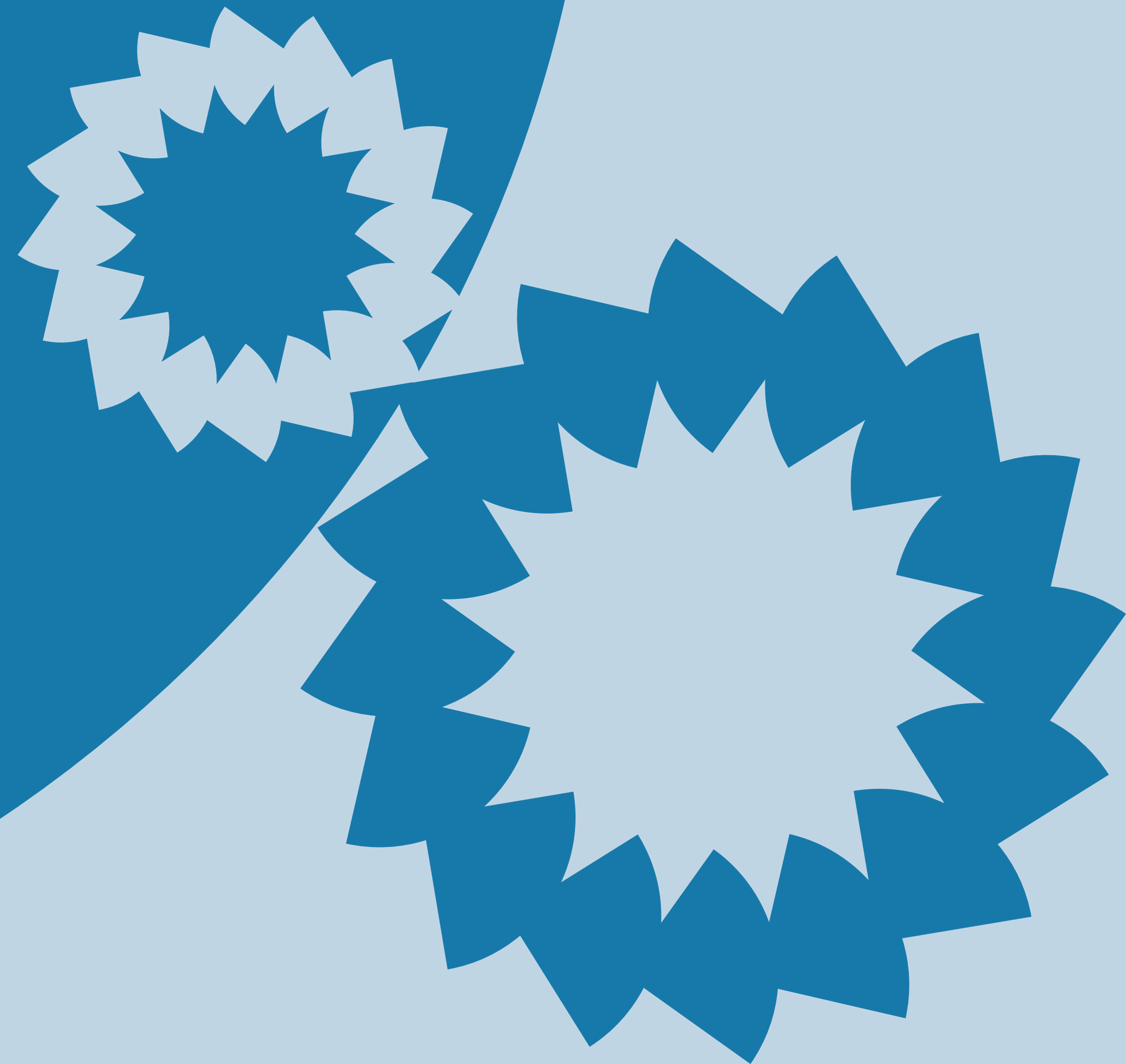
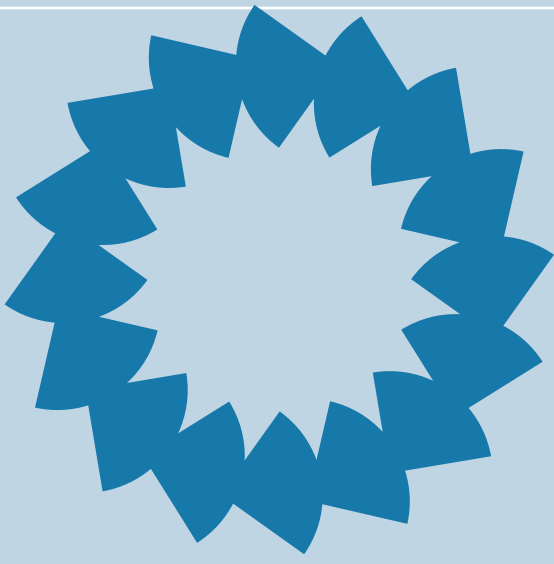
Think of different ways they could illustrate it. Photography would be a fantastic tool here. Can they use editing software to edit a photograph of a local landmark so that it can be seen afresh, in a new way? How can they show Manchester in their own way to pupils in Nanjing?

Pupils could use watercolour for landscape or pen and ink like the artist Stephen Wiltshire. They could even use collage or mixed media, for example, painting over a photograph or sewing on a canvas. Encourage them to be as creative as they want!



## Other prompts about ‘Where I live’ as cultural exchange

- Physical landmarks are only one aspect of a city. What are some customs or daily habits of people in Greater Manchester, or famous people or things pupils can write/create art about to show their city? E.g. trams, football, music/bands, working bee, cotton mills.
- Poems can be written using questions. What questions would pupils ask in detail to learn about Nanjing? What do pupils already know about China that can help them form a meaningful dialogue to learn about where their peers live or how their daily lives are?







**Appendix**

**Further  
resources**



Click on these hyperlinks to find extra resources

Themes	Resources used in exercises	Additional resources
Ecological theme of ‘Real Contentment’	<a href="#">From Apes to Zebras by Liz Brownlee, Sue Hardy-Dawson and Roger Stephens</a>	<a href="#">Poetry Society’s resources about climate change (some specifically for KS2 &amp; 3)</a> <a href="#">Poetry Society’s resources about Nature (all ages)</a> <a href="#">Morning in the forest by Aranea Glover-Porter, winner of Greenpeace’s Poems of the Planet competition, Category 7-11</a>
Chinese New Year	<a href="#">Chinese Zodiac Story</a> <a href="#">The Lost Words, Roy MacFarlane and Jackie Morris</a>	<b>2025 Year of the Snake:</b> <a href="#">British Council primary education pack to celebrate the Year of the Snake (Similar packs were also created for the previous Chinese New Years, see IOE link below)</a> <a href="#">STEM Learning - object making</a> <a href="#">tes (some may not be free)</a> <a href="#">Twinkl (some may not be free)</a>  <b>Chinese New Year in general/from previous years:</b> <a href="#">IOE CI (Institute of Education Confucius Institute for Schools) resources about Chinese New Year</a> <a href="#">IOE CI Chinese New Year worksheet for KS3</a>
Where I live	<a href="#">Riddle Place Poems from Lonely Planet Kids</a> <a href="#">Artwork by Stephen Wiltshire</a>	<a href="#">More artwork by Stephen Wiltshire</a>

Click on these hyperlinks to find extra resources

Themes	Resources used in exercises	Additional resources
Shape poems (suitable for KS2)	<a href="#">From Apes to Zebras</a> by Liz Brownlee, <a href="#">Sue Hardy-Dawson</a> and <a href="#">Roger Stephens</a>	<a href="#">Mrs. Magill’s &amp; Mrs. Morton’s class in Windsor Hill Primary School, Newry</a> <a href="#">Twinkl’s resource via Wooden Hill Primary and Nursery School, Bracknell</a>
Plays/drama (suitable for KS2)	<a href="#">Chinese Zodiac Story</a>	<a href="#">BBC</a> <a href="#">BBC</a> <a href="#">tes (some may not be free)</a>
Onomatopoeia (suitable for KS2)	<a href="#">The Lost Words</a> , <a href="#">Roy MacFarlane</a> and <a href="#">Jackie Morris</a>	<a href="#">BBC</a> <a href="#">Funny examples of onomatopoeia poems</a>

Let Me Describe the Rainstorm  
By Han Dong, Translated by Nicky Harman

Let me describe the rainstorm  
It is nothing out of the ordinary  
And in fact, it’s already stopped  
Last night, the rain beat down on broad leaves  
Making the whole plane tree quiver

I’ve been through countless nights like this  
Sometimes I’m still out in the street  
Far away  
I see lights in a window  
Shining out into the darkness of the wind and rain  
But it will take a long time  
To walk over to the window

Last night I sat at home  
My window shut  
The lights turned off  
The rain beat on the leaves  
Then pinged onto the ground

This is spring rain, it will not make  
The flowers wither and fall  
In the world around, there’s only  
The rise and fall of joyful sobbing

Looks like a few more rains will have to fall  
To express all the joy and sorrow from every heart  
While real contentment comes  
With a ray of sunlight  
Shining in a woodland clearing

『写这场雨』  
韩东

写这场雨  
它是极其普通的  
并且已经停息  
昨夜雨打在宽阔的叶子上  
使得整棵梧桐都颤动起来

我经历了无数个这样的夜晚  
有时候还在路上  
老远  
看见窗户上的灯光  
向着黑暗中的风雨打开  
可走到窗下  
还要好长的时间

昨夜我坐在房子里  
我的窗户已关闭  
我的灯光熄灭了  
雨打在叶子上  
又清脆的落到地上

这是一场春雨  
花儿不会因此凋零  
只有喜悦的啜泣声  
在周围的世界里此起彼伏的

看来这样的雨还要再下几场  
才能吐尽各人心中的悲欢  
而真正的幸福降临  
是一道阳光  
照在林中空地上

This resource has been created by the Manchester City of Literature for the Real Contentment: International Artist Exchange between Manchester and Nanjing. If you use this resource or have any questions, let us know and share your ideas by emailing [anita.ngai@manchestercityofliterature.com](mailto:anita.ngai@manchestercityofliterature.com).

All credits of poems, videos and artwork included go to the original artists.

**About Real Contentment - International Artist Exchange Programme - Manchester & Nanjing**

Supported by the British Council through its International Collaboration Grants, the Real Contentment – International Artist Exchange Programmes' partners include Creative Manchester/University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University (Manchester Poetry Library & School of Art), Confucius Institute Manchester, Nanjing University and Nanjing University of the Arts.

**About Manchester City of Literature**

Manchester was successful in its bid to join UNESCO's worldwide Creative Cities network as a City of Literature in 2017. Joining 52 other Cities of Literature, a consortium including Manchester City Council, the Universities, Manchester Literature Festival plus a range of the city's writers, publishers and literary organisations formed to enable this to happen. Network-wide collaborations have included World Poetry Day, International Literacy Day, Translation Day, and International Mother Language Day – which Manchester leads on. Manchester projects have included Manchester Multilingual City Poets, Festival of Libraries, Schools Writing Trail and Re:Sound.

**#MCRNJExchange**

**Chinese New Year 2025**

**[manchestercityofliterature.com](http://manchestercityofliterature.com)**

