

**‘Where a quiet voice  
can become a loud  
voice’**

**Children, Young People  
and Poetry in 2024**

**Francesca Bonafede, Christina Clark, Irene Picton and  
Elena Chamberlain**

**National Literacy Trust**

**October 2024**

**“Poetry raises generations. It fuels a love for writing at a younger age, all the way to the end. I wouldn't be who I am without it, and neither would the world.”**

**(Girl, Year 9)**

Poetry has been experiencing a renaissance since the mid-2020s as a dynamic and shape-shifting literary form that thrives in technological ecosystems. It provides an incisive platform to speak the struggles of new generations trying to make sense of a world and facing unprecedented challenges. Nielsen BookScan continues to record yearly highs for poetry book sales since the record high of 2018 when sales increased by £1.3m compared to 2017 totaling £12.3m. Whether trending on Instagram and TikTok or featuring in television adverts, fashion magazines, iconic pop albums, talk shows, or broadcast to 33.8 million Americans at a presidential inauguration, a new wave of poetry seems to have left the page to enjoy a renewed relevance and visibility in contemporary culture.

The National Literacy Trust has been tracking children and young people’s habits and attitudes around the reading and writing of poetry since 2005. This large evidence base, paired with practical learning from 10 years of delivering poetry programmes for children and young people, has allowed us to gather increasingly sophisticated insights into the many benefits that engagement with poetry brings. From contributing to literacy outcomes to supporting personal growth and mental wellbeing, poetry has proven to be a valuable but potentially pedagogically overlooked form.

For the first time in 2018, when 41% of buyers who contributed to the unexpected record sales of poetry books were aged 13 to 22<sup>1</sup> and the Instapoetry phenomenon was rising, we set out, in partnership with Forward Arts Foundation, to find out

<sup>1</sup> Nielsen BookScan 2018.

more about children and young people's views of poetry beyond reading and writing.<sup>2</sup> At the time, our bespoke survey revealed that many children and young people understood poetry as something to be heard, watched and performed, with creativity, playfulness and self-expression as the most valued aspects of poetry in its many forms. Two years after this bespoke survey, during the 2020 lockdown, the 2 in 5 children who told us that writing made them feel better during the pandemic were five times as likely to write poems than their peers (66.5% vs. 13.4%).

Poetry engagement appears to remain steady amid the many socioeconomic challenges we face, as we continue to piece together the implications of living, teaching and learning in a complex post-pandemic society. With this report, we set out to revisit engagement with poetry in all its forms to update our evidence base and explore the important role poetry can play in the lives of our children and young people.

## Method

Between 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024 and 21<sup>st</sup> June 2024, 4,372 children and young people aged 8 to 16 from 28 schools across England responded to our survey about engagement with poetry. The survey contained 29 questions. The main foci were affective and behavioural aspects of reading, watching, listening, writing and performing poetry, including enjoyment, attitudes, motivation and engagement with different formats, including print, performance and social media. The survey also explored how children and young people might use poetry to support their mental wellbeing or speak to issues and causes they care about.

Schools were recruited from April onwards through our networks, newsletters and social media followers, as well as through partner organisations like Forward Arts Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> Clark, C. & Lant, F. (2018) *A thing that makes me happy: Children, young people and poetry in 2018*. Study commissioned by [Forward Arts Foundation](#).

## The 2024 sample

4,372

Children and young people aged 8 to 16 from England participated between April and June 2024.

### Gender

**46.5%** boy

**49.2%** girl

**0.7%** non-binary

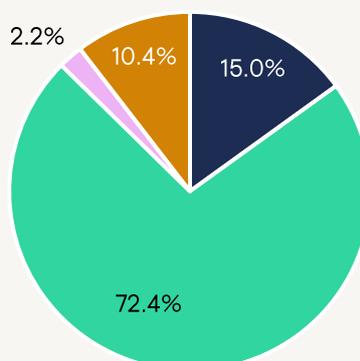
**2.3%** would rather not say

**1.3%** described another way

### Age of respondents

**21.6%** aged 8 to 11 / **71.0%** aged 11 to 14 / **7.4%** aged 14 to 16

### Free School Meal (FSM) uptake



■ FSM ■ Non-FSM ■ Would rather not say ■ Don't know

# Key findings

---

## What is poetry to children and young people?

- We asked children and young people what they think poetry is. Most of the comments could be grouped either into definitions linked to the linguistic, structural and technical features of poetry (e.g. rhyme, meter, poetic devices etc.) or to the impact of poetry on its audience or writer.
- For many, poetry encourages imagination, freedom and experimentation, is a mindful or reflective practice, and/or a way of being heard and of making a change in the world.

## Engagement with poetry

- 1 in 2 (48.8%) children and young people aged 8 to 16 told us in 2024 that they engaged with poetry in some form, with 24.1% reading, listening to and/or watching it, 13.0% writing and/or performing it, and 11.7% doing both.
- This is a slight increase compared with 2018, when 46.1% of children and young people engaged with poetry in their free time with 25.4% reading, listening to and/or watching it, 10.4% writing and/or performing it, and 10.3% doing both.
- In line with our previous findings, more children and young people who received free school meals (FSMs) said in 2024 that they engaged in poetry in their free time compared with their peers who did not receive FSMs. For example, 1 in 3 (32.6%) of those who received FSMs read, watched or listened to poetry compared with 1 in 5 (20.9%) of those who did not receive FSMs.
- In 2024, more girls than boys and more children from younger than from older age groups engaged with poetry in its various forms. For example, 3 in 10 (29.0%) girls said they read, watched or listened to poetry compared with 1 in 5 (19.1%) boys. 1 in 2 (48.7%) children aged 8 to 11 read, watched or listened to poetry compared with 1 in 6 (17.3%) young people aged 14 to 16.
- Many children and young people who engaged with poetry considered it to have a positive impact on individuals and how they interact with the world. 3 in 4 (76.2%) agreed that “Poetry inspires people to do good things”, 2 in 3 (63.7%) that “Poetry helps me imagine a better world” and 1 in 2 (48.3%) believed “Poetry can make the world a better place”.

## What topics children and young people read and write poetry about

- When asked what the poetry they engaged with tended to be about, most children and young people told us they engaged with (listened, read, watched, read or performed) poetry about topics such as life, love, family, nature and animals, although many said they engaged with poetry about anything.
- Children and young people's comments suggested that the poetry they read, listened to or watched often provided an opportunity to reflect on the world and the human condition, on the complexities of existence, and to consider different cultural and political perspectives.
- Those who wrote and performed poems told us that they did so with an introspective tone, suggesting poetry offered them space for self-reflection, self-discovery and finding ways to navigate complex life situations.

## A focus on poetry readers, listeners and watchers: formats and motivation for engaging with poetry

- Focusing on those children and young people who read, listened to or watched poetry in their free time, the most popular way for this group to engage with poetry was by reading it (71.3%). However, almost 2 in 5 (37.3%) listened to poetry and 1 in 5 (22.1%) watched poetry.
- Print was the dominant format for poetry reading, with 3 in 4 (73.7%) accessing it this way. However, many also reported reading poetry through digital means, such as on websites (33.7%) or social media (30.4%). Most of those who watched poetry also did so through digital means, with 3 in 5 (58.5%) watching poetry on channels such as YouTube and TikTok, while 3 in 10 (30.5%) said they watched poetry through live performances.
- Children and young people who read, listened to or watched poetry did so for reasons we grouped into three categories: self-growth (e.g. to learn new words or things, or feel more confident), introspection (e.g. to relax or work through emotions) and civic identity formation (e.g. to learn about issues or causes they care about or to understand the views of other people).

## A focus on poetry writers and performers: formats and motivations for engaging with poetry

- Of the group of children and young people who told us they wrote or performed poetry, 3 in 4 (74.2%) wrote poetry and 2 in 5 (41.9%) performed it.

- While writing poetry was most popular in print, with 3 in 4 (76.8%) doing this, 1 in 3 (36.1%) children and young people wrote poetry using digital formats (i.e. online or on their phones). Most of those who told us they performed poetry did so in person, with 1 in 5 either performing original work (20.2%) or other people's work (21.1%).
- Most of those who told us they performed poetry did so in person, with 1 in 5 either performing original work (20.2%) or other people's work (21.1%).
- 2 in 3 (64.3%) of those who told us that they wrote and/or performed poetry shared their poetry with others. When asked why they shared their poetry, 1 in 2 (51.1%) said they did so to inspire others, while 3 in 10 shared either to make a change (30.5%) or to have their voices heard (28.4%), emphasising the role of poetry in fostering social connections. At the same time, more than 1 in 2 (50.8%) children and young people did not feel confident to share their poetry, while almost 1 in 2 (45.6%) preferred to keep their poetry private.
- We also asked children and young people who told us they wrote or performed poetry to reflect on their motivations for doing so. We grouped 11 motivation items conceptually to form three categories: social and civic identity formation, introspection and self-growth. Over half the children and young people wrote to feel creative, with nearly 1 in 2 (49.6%) doing so to express their ideas and imagination. A high percentage were motivated by the need for introspection, with nearly 1 in 2 writing to express their thoughts and feelings (49.2%) and to feel happier (47.3%). Over half wrote to deal with problems and work through their emotions.

### Children and young people who don't engage with poetry

- More than 1 in 2 (51.2%) children and young people who responded to our survey told us that they didn't engage with poetry.
- When asked why they didn't engage with poetry, many told us that it wasn't because they thought poetry was too hard or because they didn't get it, or because poetry in school had put them off. Instead, most of those who didn't engage with poetry thought it was boring (41.2%) or that it wasn't about topics they were interested in (31.8%).
- We also invited children and young people to tell us in their own words why they didn't engage with poetry, and comments reiterated that many of the disengaged group found poetry boring or at least not about topics that interested them. However, others didn't feel poetry was relevant to their lives, or, in contrast to the feelings of poetry lovers about its impact, that it

had no purpose. Some comments suggested an association with schoolwork had affected their feelings about poetry, or that they found it difficult to comprehend, and a handful of children lacked opportunities to engage with poetry.

This report highlights the significant benefits poetry brings to children and young people's lives. It offers a unique way to foster creativity, support mental wellbeing, and encourage self-expression. Notably, it can be a powerful tool in literacy education, particularly for disadvantaged students who consistently show higher engagement with poetry. The introspective nature of poetry helps children and young people process complex emotions, a critical need given the rising challenges of our technological and socioeconomically turbulent post-pandemic society. The National Literacy Trust advocates for increased intellectual and financial investment in poetry-based pedagogies to harness poetry's potential at this time of profound change.

“

**Poetry makes people feel  
welcomed and important.  
(Boy, Year 8)**

”

## What is poetry to children and young people?

Poetry notoriously evades definition. It can be about and motivated by anything, it can be of any length and feature carefully designed prosodic features or be the result of free writing. It can live on a page, in a performance, in an Instagram post, or simply in the mind of the spoken-word artist. It can be read, listened to, watched,



“Poetry is a story you tell about something personal to you, in the form of spoken music.” **(Girl, Year 12)**

“Songs inspired by stories.” **(Boy, Year 3)**

“[Poetry is] a song with no music.” **(Girl, Year 9)**

The second broader category defines poetry by its impact on the writer, the reader and audiences more widely with three subcategories emerging from it: poetry as imagination, freedom and experimentation; poetry as mindfulness, reflection and emotional depth; and poetry as being heard and making change happen.

## Poetry as imagination, freedom and experimentation

This first theme celebrated several aspects of poetry often associated with creative thinking and the creative process. Poetry is often described as a process of drawing on imagination or even equated to imagination itself:

“Poetry is when you create something of your own imagination and make it into an adventure and journey of your own.” **(Girl, Year 6)**

“[Poetry is] to let your imagination out into the world.” **(Boy, Year 6)**

“Poetry is a world of imagination with a twist and a slip of the tongue.”  
**(Girl, Year 7)**

“[Poetry] is a way of imagining a better place.” **(Girl, Year 5)**

Some appreciated the freedom intrinsic to poetic practices and the value of the experimental and exploratory possibilities offered within the poetic environment:

“Poetry to me is freedom.” **(Girl, Year 12)**

“Total freedom to explore thoughts and feelings without rules!” **(Girl, Year 6)**

“I think poetry is a way to express yourself and your creativity without feeling the pressure to make it perfect or for other people, it’s a great way to just take a break and make it for yourself and you have that creative freedom.” **(Girl, Year 7)**

“I think poetry is a way to capture a moment in time/a feeling freely, without being restricted by rules/boundaries you have to follow like in creative writing. It takes into account the sound of the words and the images they create in your mind, finding a regular beat or being deliberately higgledy-piggledy.” **(Girl, Year 9)**

## Poetry as mindfulness, reflection and emotional depth

The second theme related to aspects of poetry often associated with reflective and mindful practices. Many children and young people described a poetic practice that is deeply personal in nature and identified poetry as a medium to become aware of one's interior life as well as integrate, process and better understand emotional thoughts and experiences.

"I believe poetry is a way to express a feeling which cannot be held in any other writing – it helps me get a better understanding of what my ideas can take me to in just a few sentences and words." **(Girl, Year 9)**

"Poetry is a way of saying your feelings even if you don't understand, you can make it not make sense to others but to you, it can be crystal clear because the words you write are what you express." **(Girl, Year 8)**

"[Poems] are a friend, they are family, they are even a therapist, poetry can be anything as long as your imagination reaches far enough." **(Non-binary, Year 6)**

"I think poetry is using description to speak about things in a way that relates to people's souls, it goes deeper and explores things in a way that makes me feel connected to the words and the emotions being portrayed." **(Girl, Year 10)**

## Poetry as being heard and making change happen

The final theme celebrates the civic and social impact of poetry from amplifying voices to promoting empathy and inspiring change. Many described poetry as the go-to medium to speak about important things and to be heard:

"Poetry is something where one quiet voice can become a loud voice and can be heard and motivate someone in many ways." **(Boy, Year 10)**

"Poetry is a way of many people expressing themselves or their ideas about the world/society as that is the only way they are able to communicate their points." **(Girl, Year 10)**

"It's something we can use to express important things in our lives and to get it heard. It's important." **(Girl, Year 8)**

"I think poetry is a new way to communicate with other people and a way many revert to if they want to be heard." **(Girl, Year 8)**

Others described poetry's ability not simply to drive societal change but also to change minds, opinions and ideas and build empathy and understanding:

“Poetry is where you express something that you think is and that could change something.” **(Boy, Year 7)**

“A poem is a piece of writing that can make you change how you think.”  
**(Girl, Year 7)**

“Poetry is something very powerful and can make a change to a lot of things.”  
**(Girl, Year 8)**

“Poetry is art, it is a reflection of life through a lens that might not be our own. We explore perspectives and ideas, building empathy and understanding. Poetry guides us through life, and can create an insight into lives that were lived before our own. Poetry is power, freedom and passion.” **(Girl, Year 9)**

These findings indicate that poetry supports children and young people's creative efforts, emotional wellbeing and personal growth. Children and young people describe poetry as a dynamic vehicle through which they project their inner world, perceive and experience the world around them, and also embed new meaning into the world, acknowledging their agency through 'being heard' and motivation for making or inspiring societal change.

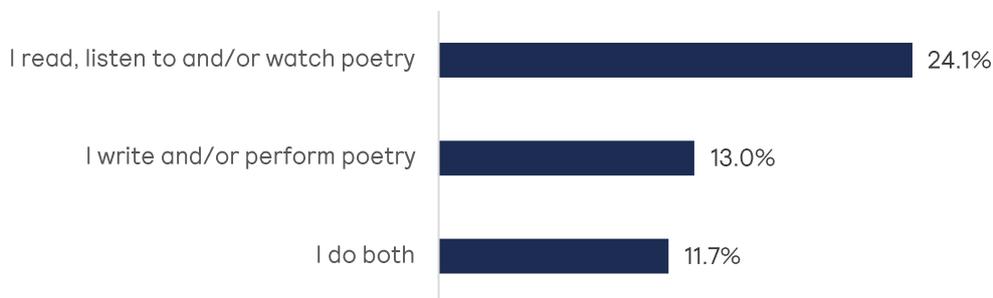
## Engagement with poetry in 2024

---

After understanding how children and young people define poetry, we wanted to explore how many of them engage with it by reading, listening to, watching, writing and/or performing it.

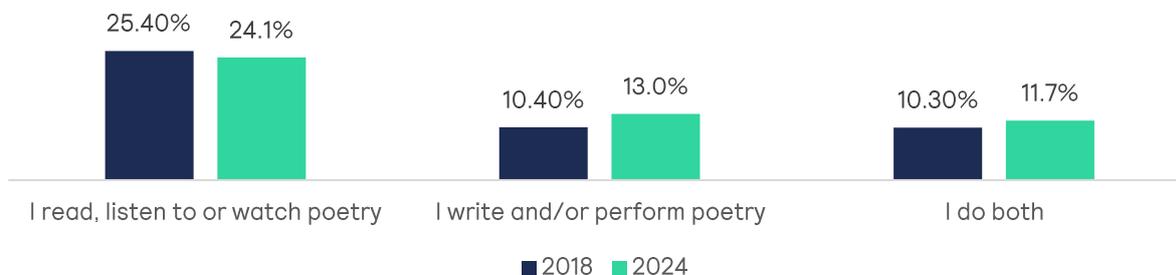
Nearly 1 in 2 (48.8%) children and young people aged 8 to 16 engaged with poetry in one form or another in 2024. Some forms of engagement were more popular than others. More specifically, nearly twice as many children and young people in 2024 said that they read, listened to or watched poetry than said that they wrote or performed it (see Figure 2). A further 1 in 9 identified themselves as both consumers and creators of poetry.

**Figure 2: Children and young people aged 8 to 16’s engagement with poetry in 2024**



As shown in Figure 3, the percentage of children and young people engaged with poetry in 2024 is similar to the figure we recorded in 2018, when 46.1% of children and young people engaged with poetry in their free time: 25.4% reading, listening to, or watching it, 10.4% writing or performing it, and 10.3% doing both.

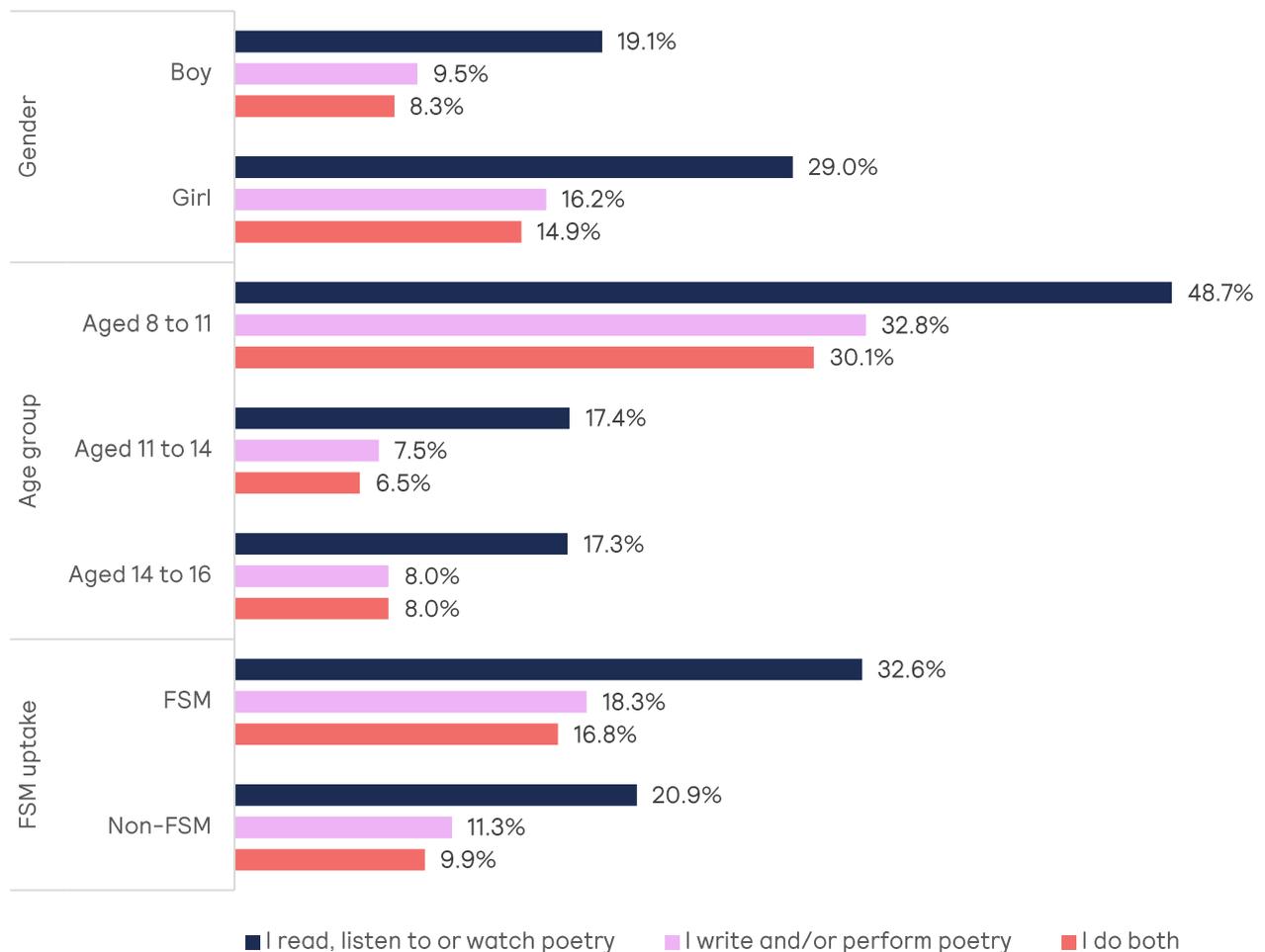
**Figure 3: Children and young people aged 8 to 16’s engagement with poetry in 2018 and 2024**



### Who engages with poetry?

As with reading and writing enjoyment, more girls than boys engaged with poetry in its various forms (see Figure 4). More children aged 8 to 11 than their older peers did the same. In line with our previous findings about children and young people who receive free school meals (FSMs), more of those who told us that they received FSMs engaged with poetry in its various forms compared with those who told us that they didn’t receive FSMs.

**Figure 4: Children and young people’s engagement with poetry in 2024 by gender, age and FSM status**



We also asked children and young people what poetry can be to them and others. As shown in Figure 5, many children agreed that poetry offers opportunities for self-expression, for processing and/or integrating emotional thoughts and experiences, and for better understanding oneself in the world. A high percentage of children and young people also agreed that poetry has positive real-world effects and is a source of inspiration for good.

**Figure 5: Percentage agreement with statements about poetry in 2024**



## What is the poetry about that children and young people engage with?

We also wanted to hear what interested children and young people when choosing to read, listen to, watch, write or perform poetry. As a result, we invited them to tell us, in their own words, what topics interested them. As shown in the word cloud (Figure 6), most children and young people told us they listened, read, watched, read or performed funny poems and poems about life, love, family, nature and animals. Many celebrated the dynamism of poetry, telling us that they read, listened to, watched, wrote or performed poetry about anything.



“Either comedic jokey poetry, or listen to/watch poetry which questions society and how we view ourselves/each other.” **(Girl, Year 12)**

“Cultural struggles, racism, gender, financial struggles, love.” **(Girl, Year 12)**

A deeper analysis of responses by those who wrote or performed poetry revealed that many wrote or performed poems about introspection. For them, poetry offers a space for self-reflection, self-discovery and finding ways of navigating complex life situations, such as:

“My own issues or depictions of what it means to be human, love, death, joy.”  
**(I describe myself another way, Year 12)**

“My state of mind or my struggles.” **(Girl, Year 12)**

“It’s often a way that I can just put my emotions down on paper so I can work the stuff out in my head into some sort of order and sense.”  
**(I describe myself another way: trans-masc, Year 12)**

“My own mental health, and my experiences as an autistic person.” **(Girl, Year 10)**

“However I am feeling at that time I write it to help express my emotions and work through how I am feeling.” **(Girl, Year 9)**

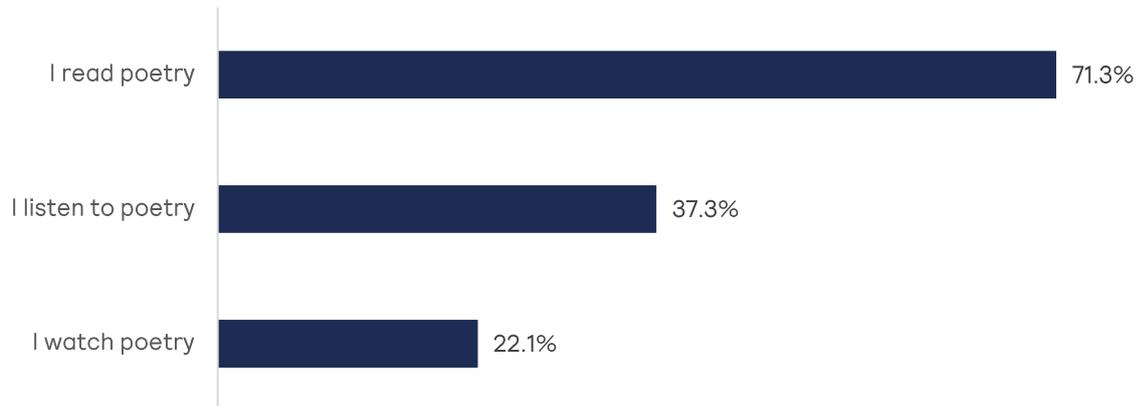
“To help people see others’ views, the uniqueness of others, to help to explain a moment in a short way.” **(Girl, Year 9)**

## A focus on children and young people who read, watch and listen to poetry

Focusing on children and young people who told us that they read, listened to or watched poetry (n = 1,565), most did so through reading (see Figure 7). However, many engaged with poetry in audio and visual formats: more than 1 in 3 said that they listened to poetry through recordings or soundtracks and more than 1 in 5 watched it through videos or live performances.<sup>3</sup>

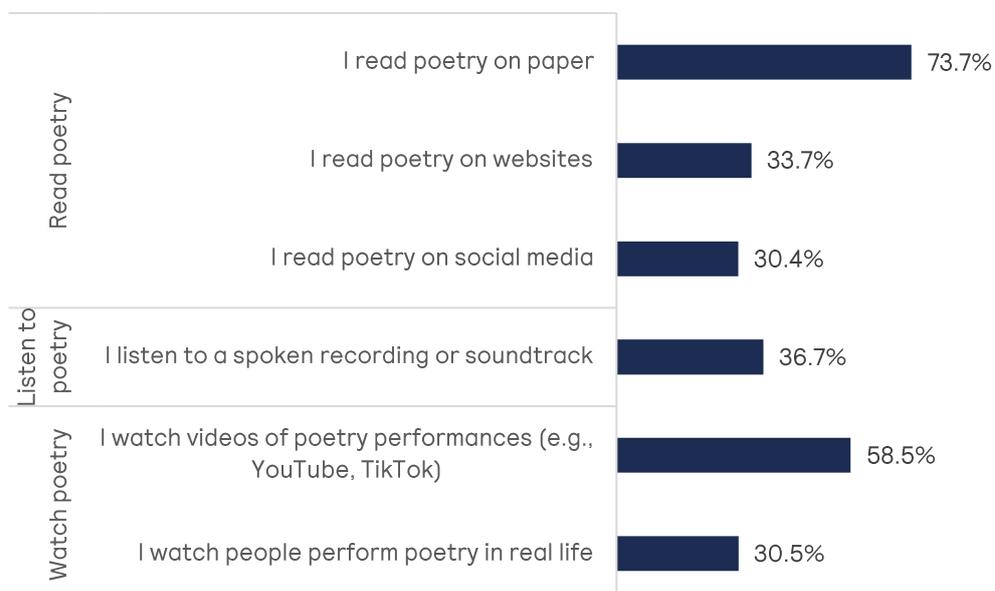
<sup>3</sup> As children and young people could tick all that apply, the percentage doesn’t add up to 100.

**Figure 7: Percentage of children and young people who read, listened to or watched poetry in 2024**



As shown in Figure 8, most children and young people who read poetry still read it on paper, while 1 in 3 read poetry on websites and 3 in 10 read it on social media. 3 in 5 (58.5%) children and young people who watched poetry in their free time watched videos of poetry performances (e.g. YouTube, TikTok), while 3 in 10 (30.5%) watched live poetry performances.

**Figure 8: Formats children and young people use to read, listen to, or watch poetry**



Children and young people also told us in their own words how they read, listened to and watched poetry:

“Poetry is a good thing to read on holiday, friend’s house and at home.”  
(Girl, Year 3)

“[I] read poetry via apps like Google Books.” (Girl, Year 10)

“Mum reads poetry book [sic] to me.” (Girl, Year 3)

Some respondents told us that poetry was read to them, and that they accessed poetry through rap and music:

“I listen to poetry through rap and sometimes in class.” (Boy, Year 7)

“I listen to music which is basically poetry, all the time.” (Boy, Year 7)

Though a smaller proportion of children and young people told us they watched poetry, their comments still gave us insight into how they watched it:

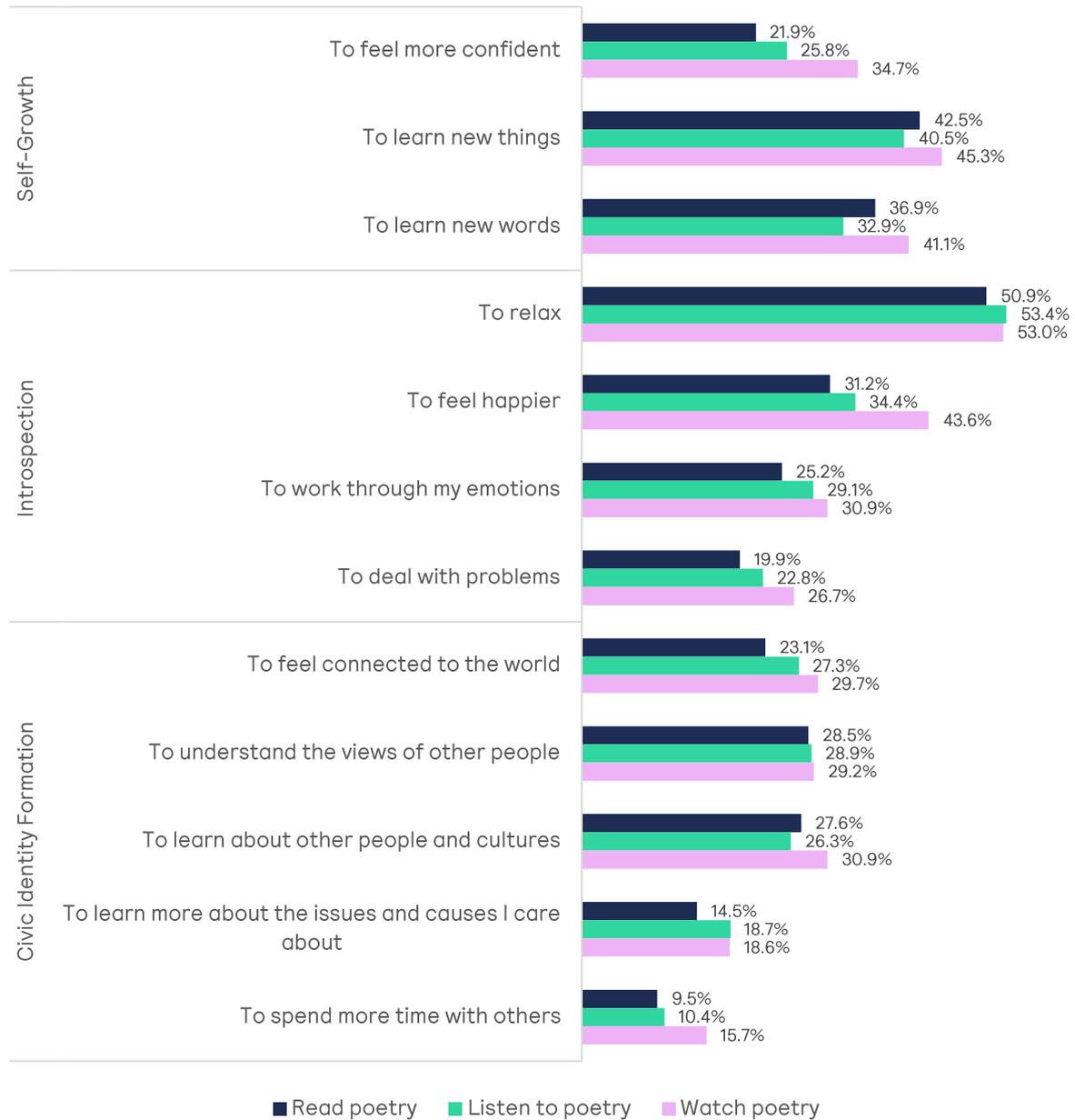
“I watch poetry animations.” (Boy, Year 11)

“I watch [poetry] being performed on television.” (Girl, Year 4)

## **Why children and young people read, listened to or watched poetry in 2024**

We also asked children and young people who told us they read, listened to or watched poetry to reflect on their motivations for doing so. We grouped 12 motivation items conceptually to form three categories: self-growth, introspection and civic identity formation. As shown in Figure 9, over half engaged with poetry to relax and over 2 in 5 to learn new things.

**Figure 9: Why children and young people read, listened to and watched poetry in 2024**

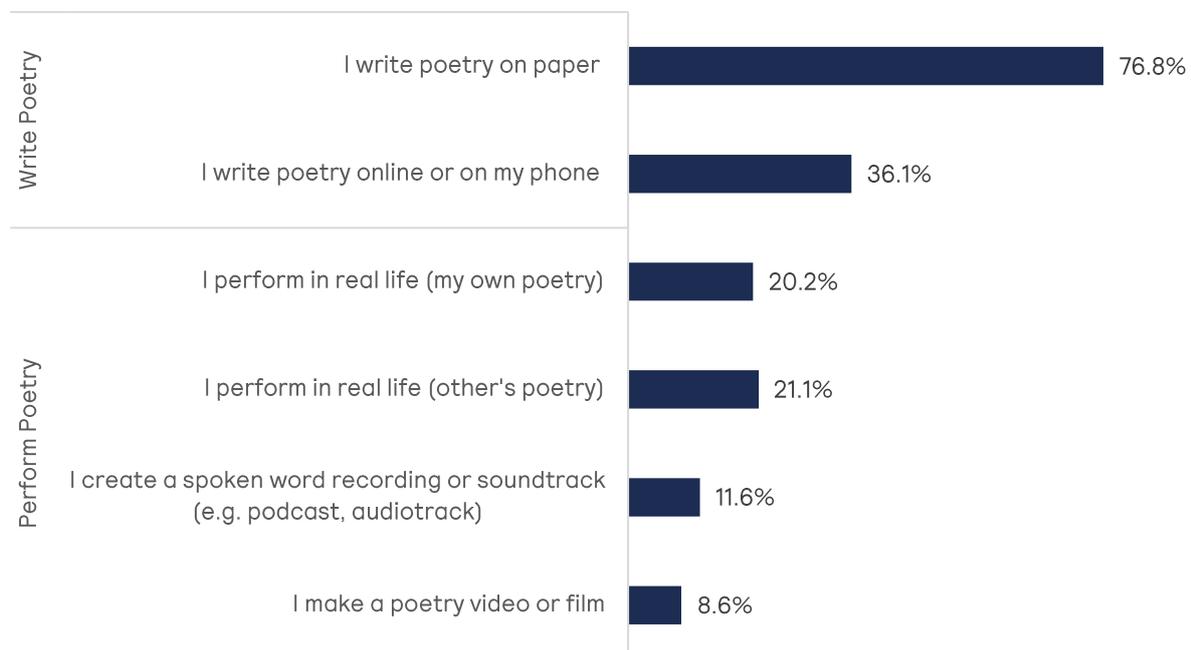


## A focus on children and young people who write and perform poetry

Focusing on children and young people who told us that they write or perform poetry in their free time (n = 1,080), 3 in 4 (74.2%) said that they write poetry and 2 in 5 (41.9%) perform it.

As shown in Figure 10, most children and young people who write poetry do so on paper (76.8%), although 1 in 3 (36.1%) write poetry using digital formats (i.e. online or on their phones). Most children and young people who told us they perform poetry do so in real life with 1 in 5 either performing original work or other people’s work.

**Figure 10: How children and young people wrote and/or performed poetry in 2024**



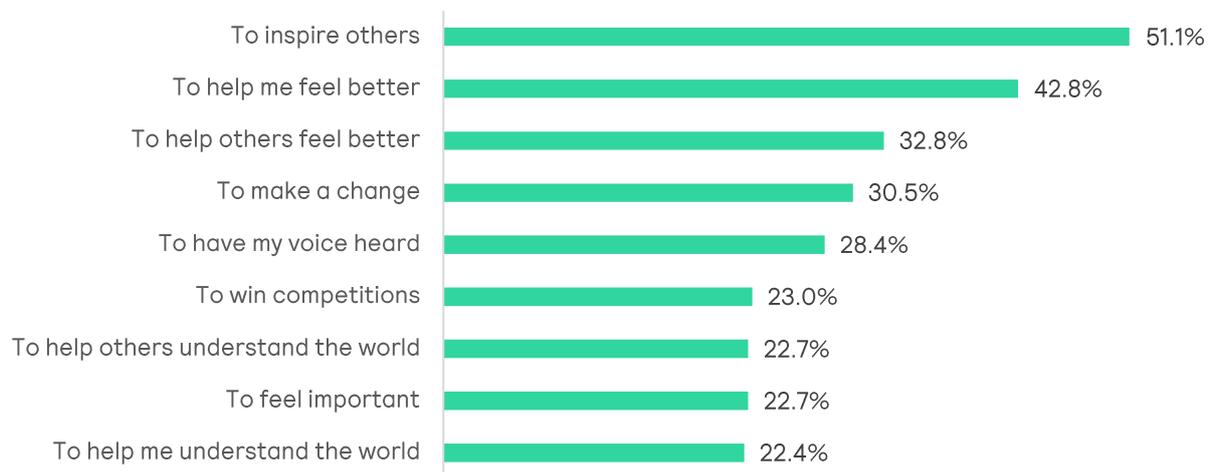
### A spotlight on sharing

2 in 3 (64.3%) of those who told us that they write and/or perform poetry also share their poetry with others. Figure 11 shows why they share, with 1 in 2 doing so to

inspire others and a high percentage sharing to feel better and help others feel better.

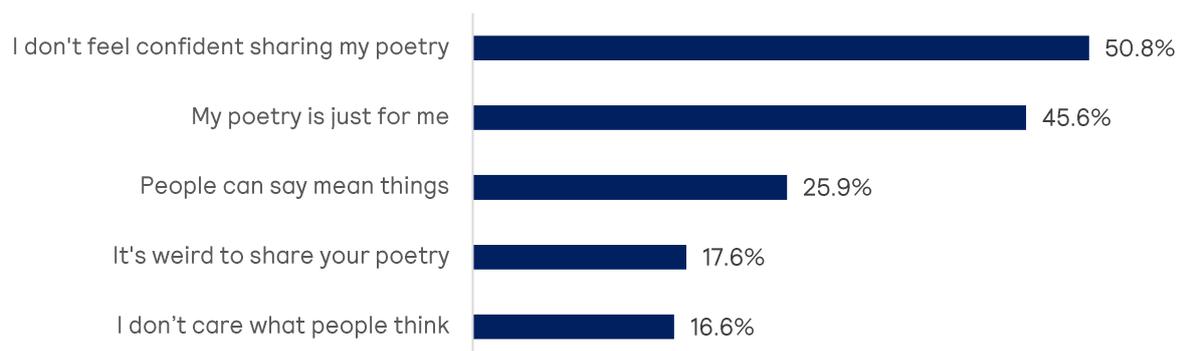
These findings shed light on how, through sharing, young poets experience social connectivity, foster interpersonal relationships, and develop a sense of belonging. With 30.5% of young poets sharing to make a change and 28.4% to have their voices heard, many young poets share as an acknowledgment of their agency and motivation for societal change.

**Figure 11: Why children and young people shared their poetry with others in 2024**



As shown in Figure 12, over half of those who told us that they didn't share their poetry did so because they lacked confidence. However, 45.6% told us that they didn't share their poetry because it was just for them.

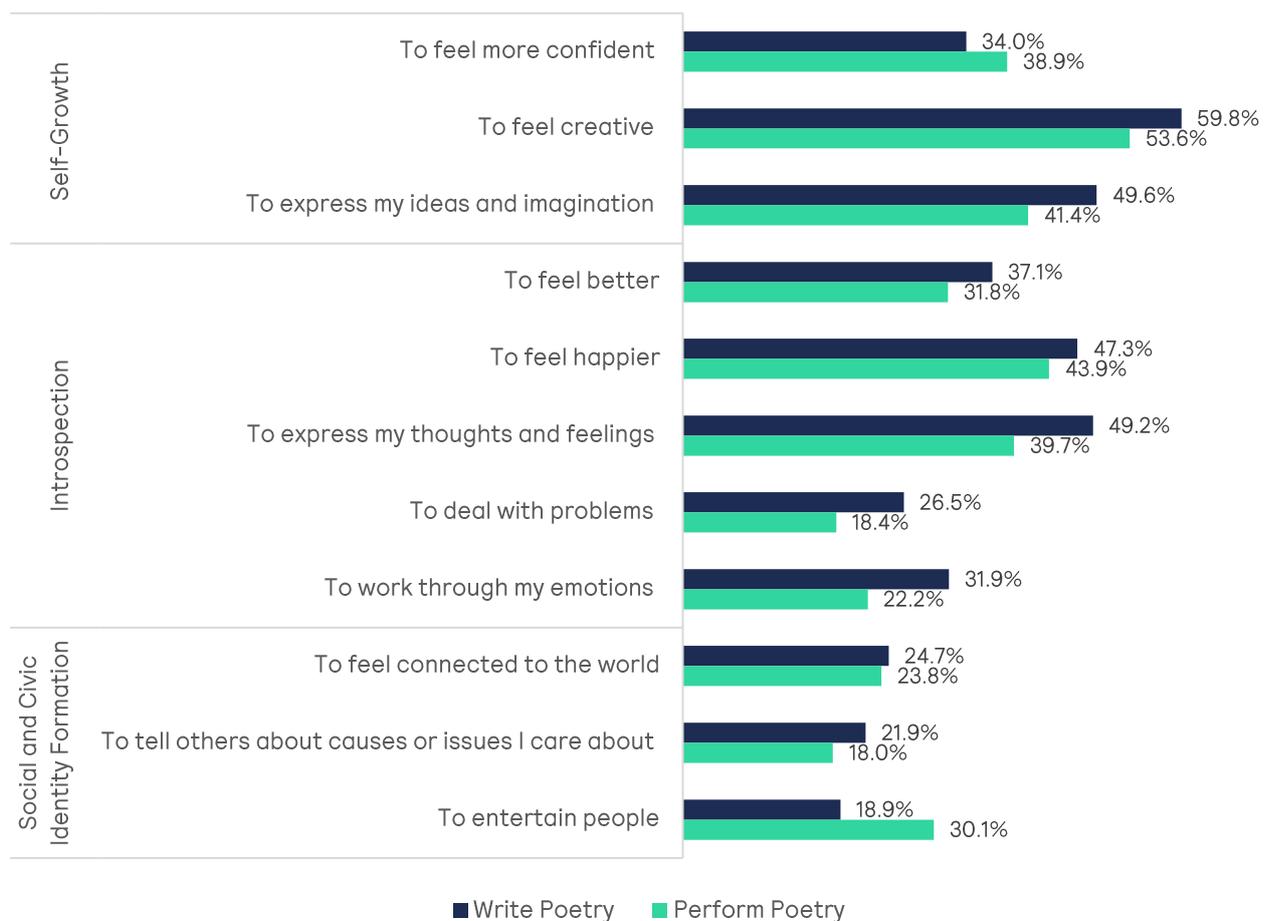
**Figure 12: Why children and young people didn't share their poetry with others in 2024**



## Why children and young people wrote or performed poetry in 2024

We also asked children and young people who told us they wrote or performed poetry to reflect on their motivations for doing so. We grouped 11 motivation items conceptually to form three categories: self-growth, introspection and social and civic identity formation. As shown in Figure 13, over half of children and young people wrote to feel creative with nearly 1 in 2 doing so to express their ideas and imagination. A high percentage were motivated by the need for introspection, with nearly 1 in 2 writing to express their thoughts and feelings and to feel happier. Over half wrote to deal with problems and work through their emotions.

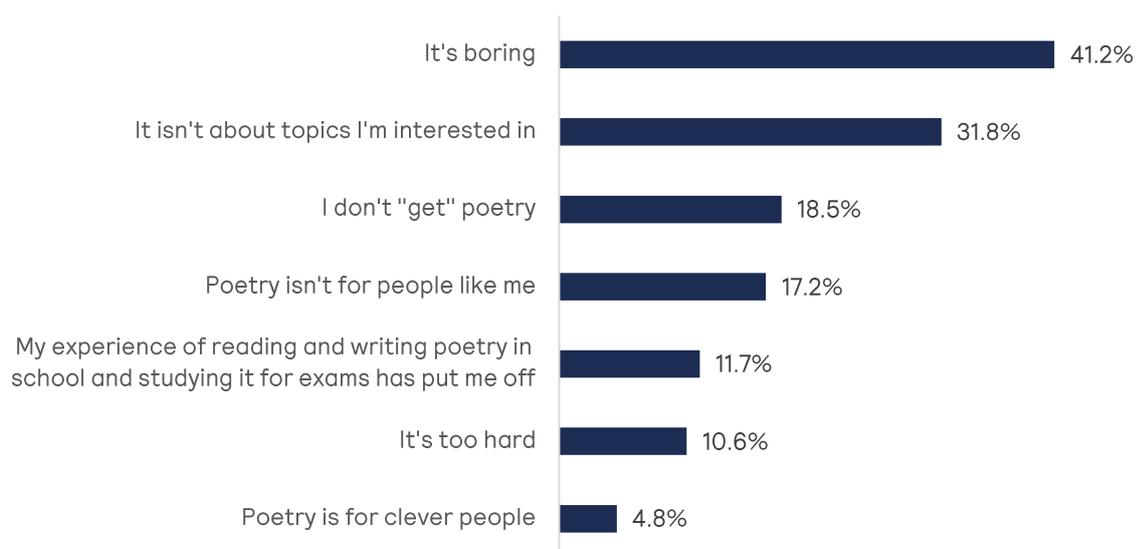
**Figure 13: Why children and young people watched and/or performed poetry in 2024**



## A focus on those who don't engage with poetry

Over half of the children and young people who responded to our survey told us that they didn't engage with poetry. As shown in Figure 14, this wasn't because they thought poetry was too hard, because they didn't get it, or because poetry in school had put them off. Instead, most of those who didn't engage with poetry didn't do so because they thought it was boring or that it wasn't about topics they were interested in – both aspects of disengagement that can be addressed by finding ways to expose children and young people to different types of poetry by diverse poets and to poetry in different formats.

**Figure 14: Why children and young people don't engage with poetry**



Some children and young people told us in their own words why they chose not to engage with poetry in their free time. Their responses largely mirror the findings above, with most of the answers outlining how poetry wasn't something they were interested in:

**“It just doesn't resonate with me.” (Boy, Year 6)**

**“I do not read or write poetry in my spare time as I prefer to read and write normal creative stories. I find these more understandable and more interesting to follow.”  
(Girl, Year 9)**

“I don’t give a flying frying pan about the arts.” **(Boy, Year 7)**

“I just don’t make an effort to read poetry, if I come across an interesting one I’ll read it but I’m just not that interested.” **(Non-binary, Year 8)**

Some shared that they were too busy to be engaged with poetry outside of school:

“I’m good at it, I just have different hobbies that I would rather do than poetry.”  
**(Boy, Year 6)**

“I am a busy person with other parts of school, sports and spending time socially.”  
**(Girl, Year 9)**

“I don’t have enough free time.” **(Boy, Year 3)**

Or that they found poetry useless and irrelevant:

“I think it would be more interesting if it was about more recent topics.”  
**(Girl, Year 8)**

“I am not interested in it because I think that it’s pointless.” **(Girl, Year 6)**

“To be honest [I] can’t be bothered and it’s boring.” **(Boy, Year 8)**

Some told us that they were interested in poetry but didn’t engage outside of school. For some young people aged 11 to 16 this was because of how school had presented poetry to them:

“I’m only interested in epic poems such as *Paradise Lost*, but haven’t gotten around to reading it, partially due [to] how much school has put me off poetry.”  
**(Boy, Year 10)**

“Even if I do want to do it, I don’t know what to write about and I never have time to because of all the work I get from school.” **(Girl, Year 8)**

“In school, we analyse poetry too much to the extent where it has been ruined and is no longer interesting and difficult.” **(Girl, Year 10)**

Others suggested that they found poetry too hard or too confusing. However, for some respondents, this suggested perhaps that they would consider engaging with poetry if it was made more accessible to them.

“Poetry is not for me unlike smarter people who make them [sic] in like two seconds.” **(Girl, Year 6)**

“I find poetry too hard and I usually don’t like performing or reading in front of many people, so that’s why I don’t read or write poetry.” (Boy, Year 7)

“I don’t understand some of the language used in poetry.” (Girl, Year 8)

Some suggested that they may be more engaged with poetry if they had the resources to do so, as there was a lack at present:

“Don’t see it so much in everyday life for example people speak more about books than poetry so [less] likely to read poetry.” (Girl, Year 12)

“I just never thought about listening to poetry in my free time.” (Boy, Year 9)

“I have never tried doing poetry but maybe if I give it a try I will like it but I don’t know.” (Girl, Year 9)

In sum, those who didn’t engage with poetry did so for a variety of reasons. For some children and young people, poetry was something they were not interested in, it was boring, or it had been made too complicated by school teaching. For others, poetry was inaccessible, whether because of the language used, lack of resources or busy schedules.

Children and young people’s diverse interests should be encouraged: not all children and young people have to enjoy poetry, but those who see themselves as ‘not smart enough’ or think that ‘poetry isn’t for people like them’ deserve access to meaningful engagement opportunities that encompass their interests and feature thoughtful exposure to poetry in different formats.

## Discussion

What this report highlights is that despite poetry not appealing to everyone, it is crucial not to overlook the numerous benefits and opportunities it offers to children and young people who choose to engage with it.

Over half of the children and young people told us that they didn’t engage with poetry at all, missing out on a dynamic low-cost readily available medium to cultivate their creativity, care for their mental wellbeing, foster interpersonal relationships, process struggles, make sense of the world and participate in civic life.

Indeed, in their responses, the children and young people who engaged with poetry celebrated all this and more. They described poetic practices that are powered by intrinsic motivations and that empower communication and self-expression. This helped turn linguistic users into fully integrated speakers with a rich interior life that they can explore and express through a language that they own and stylise rather than merely use.

Notably, 45.6% of children and young people who wrote or performed poetry told us that they didn't share it because their poetry was just for them. This suggests that, when undertaken properly, poetry has the potential to help address significant challenges in literacy instruction, namely a lack of reading and writing motivation, stamina and enjoyment. The shape-shifting nature of this dynamic literary form allows it to thrive in technological ecosystems and reach children and young people by encompassing their interests and speaking to their struggles.

We once again recorded that more children and young people who received FSMs engaged with poetry compared with their non-FSM peers (32.6% vs. 20.9% for reading, listening and watching, 18.3% vs 11.3% for writing and performing, and 16.8% vs. 9.9% for doing both). This continues to represent a 14-year trend that remained steady in the face of unprecedented socioeconomic struggles that disproportionately impacted disadvantaged families and exacerbated pressures on schools. This trend indicates that investment is needed to explore how poetry-based pedagogies could create a gateway into reading and writing for pleasure for children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Finally, both qualitative and quantitative findings strongly indicate that children and young people engaged with poetry as a medium because of its introspective qualities. They described how poetry supported self-awareness, self-discovery, and reflectiveness and provided spaces for children and young people to process and articulate (rather than define and resolve) complex experiences and feelings, as well as experimenting with potential ways of seeing one's place in the world. These findings provide rich insights into poetry's therapeutic traits at a time when increasing numbers of children and young people report low levels of mental wellbeing.

As we look ahead to a period of profound change across an increasingly complex technological and media landscape, as well as the geopolitical challenges of our turbulent post-pandemic society, we can't afford to ignore the positives that poetic practices bring to the lives of our children and young people. Financial and intellectual investment is needed to create safe pedagogical spaces for low-stakes

opportunities that are about experimenting with meaning, style, rhythm and movement to explore how poetry in all its forms can work for individual pupils.

At the National Literacy Trust, we will continue to expand the evidence base by seeking innovative research partnerships to further investigate the nature of children and young people's engagement with poetry and produce novel pedagogical insights to support practitioners and sister organisations.

Our sincere thanks to all of the schools that participated in our survey this year. We couldn't do it without you!

### 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.

Visit [www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk) to find out more, donate or sign up for a free email newsletter. You can also find us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.

### Copyright

© National Literacy Trust 2024. You may report on findings or statistics included in this report if you accredit them to the National Literacy Trust.

Suggested reference for this report is: Bonafede, F., Clark, C., Picton, I. & Chamberlain, E. (2024). 'Where a quiet voice can become a loud voice': Children, Young People and Poetry in 2024. London: National Literacy Trust.

We will consider requests to use extracts or data from this publication provided that you:

- Acknowledge that the content is the work of the National Literacy Trust and provide appropriate references in any publications or accompanying publicity;
- State that any views expressed are yours and not necessarily those of the National Literacy Trust



Change your story