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POEMS BY VALERIE BLOOM

# STARS WITH FLAMING TAILS

ILLUSTRATED BY  
KEN WILSON-MAX



This resource was inspired by  
'Stars with Flaming Tails'.

We hope you enjoy the book  
as much as we did and find  
the ideas we have come up  
with helpful.

## 'Stars with Flaming Tails' a teaching resource

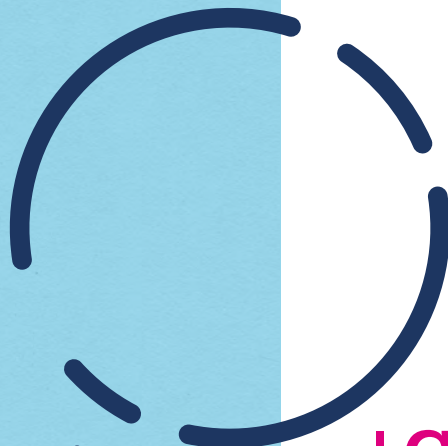
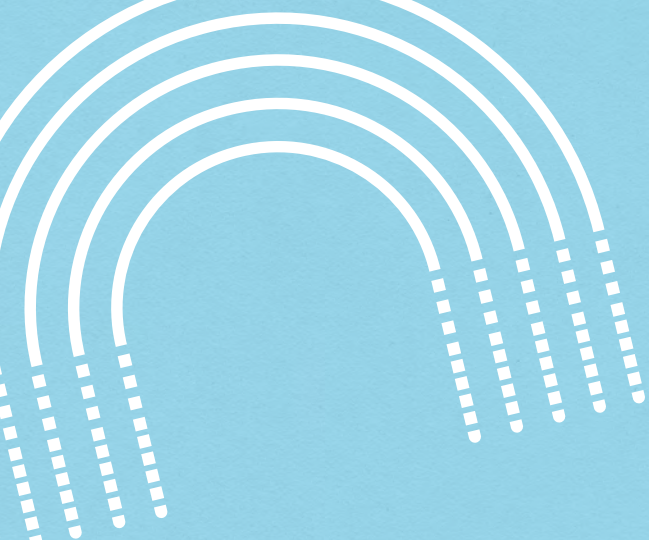
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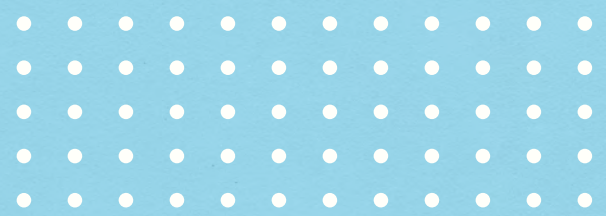
with thanks to





“This is an absolute joy of a collection, celebrating poetry in all its forms. Such a range of poems to make the reader laugh, revel in the beauty of language, reflect on and celebrate life. Valerie Bloom’s perfectly painted words, accompanied by Ken Wilson-Max’s thought-provoking and evocative illustrations make this a collection for every child to enjoy and find themselves in.”

**Charlotte Hacking CLPE**  
(Centre for Literacy in Primary Education)



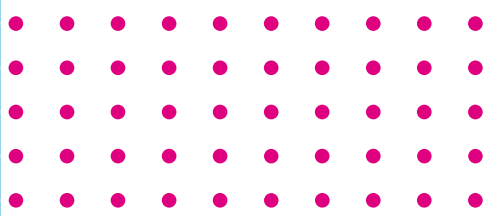
## Getting inspired by ‘Stars with Flaming Tails’

‘Stars with Flaming Tails’ contains almost a hundred poems on all sorts of topics. Poems are aimed at KS2 and are full of ideas and beautiful illustrations that implicitly invite the reader to respond. As with all good children’s poetry books, readers of any age can enjoy them.

Poems appear under the headings ‘Family and Friends’, ‘Fun with Forms’, ‘Our World’, ‘Unbelievable’ and ‘Animals’. So, as well as being a brilliant and enjoyable read, it is easy to select poems for use in themed lessons or projects. There is even a section about poetic form, which is a gift in itself.

We have picked up on some of the book’s invitations to respond by choosing 3 poems from the collection and suggesting ways of sharing, writing and drawing. Reading together is a wonderful activity, with proven benefits. When children are invited to respond to books creatively, they begin to understand their own value as readers and creators. We hope the ideas here help this in some way.

**Kaye Tew**  
(Director: Manchester Children’s Book Festival)





## CONTRARY CARL

If I say it's a train,  
 he will say it's a bus,  
 I say my name's Arlan,  
 he says, "No, it's Gus."  
 I said, "Here's a bed."  
 He said, "It's a stone."  
 I said, "Duck!" He said, "Goose!"  
 Now he's a lump on his head.



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### Watch and Listen

Valerie Bloom reads 'Contrary Carl' here:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=7x5y2M8zIy4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7x5y2M8zIy4)

To see Ken Wilson-Max's illustration of 'Contrary Carl'  
<https://youtu.be/13a6pgEhJ4k>



### Share

The rhyme scheme for this poem encourages participation and it would be good to read it aloud and invite children to insert the last word of every other line. It would also be fun to perform in pairs.

Poor Carl doesn't look too happy in the illustration of this poem. This could be because of the lump on his head but he may have been contrary in the first place because he's feeling unhappy. Ask children to 'read' the illustration and tell you what they see. The poem and the illustration might be a good way to open a conversation about why people behave in certain ways.

### Write

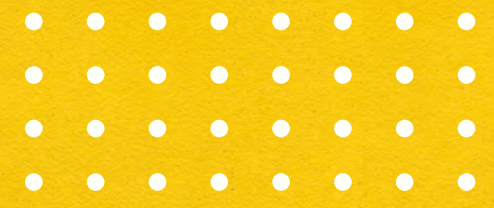
Start with the title and ask children to come up with their own character name ('Difficult Dennis', or 'Silly Sally', for example). Play around with who this character might be and how they might behave.

Use the poem's format and the start of each line 'If I say ...' and 'He says ...'. Come up with line endings that suit the new character. In the last two lines, Contrary Carl comes to a sticky end; children can have fun with this.

Before getting the children to write anything, discuss the new character and share ideas, playing with words that rhyme, noting where the rhymes in the poem appear and jotting down your ideas and theirs. Starting the writing process with a bank of ideas and words means that children already have ideas they can have fun with and build on, rather than starting with a blank page.

### Draw

Before children illustrate their characters, talk about the choices that Ken made when illustrating Carl. What might their new character look like? How might they feel? What would they wear? Which bit of their poem will the children choose to illustrate? Watch the animation of Ken's drawing process.



## BEST FRIENDS

If you were a soldier and I were your enemy  
I wouldn't fight you  
If you were a deer and I were a lion  
I wouldn't bite you

If you were a fish and I were a net  
I wouldn't catch you  
If you were a bone and I were a dog  
I wouldn't snatch you

If you were a fly and I were a swatter  
I wouldn't kill you  
If you were water and I were a carrier  
I wouldn't spill you

If you were a cup I'd be a saucer  
And let you rest on me  
And we will be best friends from now  
Until eternity.



### Watch and Listen

Valerie Bloom reads 'Best Friends' here:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=PqHJAg2GKHk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PqHJAg2GKHk)

To see Ken Wilson-Max's illustration of 'Best Friends'

<https://youtu.be/AKyvG2VoKGg>

## Share

Read the poem aloud together a few times, stopping each time to talk about something different and ask questions about it. Talk about the subject but also look at how the poem is structured. The first three verses pair two things and use them to express how best friends don't do bad things to each other, the last verse is written differently, as a positive.

Use the poem to talk about friendship, what it is and how friends behave towards each other. Children who struggle or who are worried about something might open up in a one-to-one situation.

## Write

Write your own 'Best Friends' poem. This can be done individually, in pairs, or as a group poem, bringing together ideas from the class and working out the order and rhyme scheme together.

- Notice the poem's structure and the repeated phrases, picking them out each time they appear in the poem. 'If you were a ...', 'and I was a ...', 'I wouldn't ...'. Write this out, with missing spaces and insert two nouns and a verb to create new sentences.
- Find the rhymes in Valerie's poem (fight, bite / catch, snatch / kill, spill), these connect two statements to make a verse. So the new poem will need to do this with the sentences that have been produced, too.

## Draw

The illustration is of best friends who play football. This isn't mentioned in the poem, so Ken has chosen to illustrate the person who speaks the poem and their best friend. This could be anyone, so children could illustrate the poem with a picture of them and their best friend, or best friends, if there are more than two of them. Best friends could also be brother and sister, or child and adult.

Talk about ways in which this poem could have been illustrated, there are lots of ideas that Ken could have chosen. Children might illustrate some of them and make a poem poster, either on their own or in a group.

## THE MOON TOLD THE WIND

The moon told the wind  
and the wind told the sea,  
the sea told the trees  
and the trees told me.

What they said was so exciting!  
So amazing! And so true!  
But they said it was a secret.  
I'm so sorry, I can't tell you.



### Watch and Listen

Valerie Bloom reads 'The Moon told the Wind' here:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=idokRGOnrJA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idokRGOnrJA)

To see Ken Wilson-Max's illustration of  
'The Moon told the Wind'  
<https://youtu.be/UcGJlecdMOY>



### Share

This poem really lends itself to performance, inviting children to reach for the moon, waft with the wind, swim in the sea and become a tree, complete with sound effects. The second verse teases the reader by not telling the secret. What might that secret be? What is so exciting, so amazing and so true?

### Write

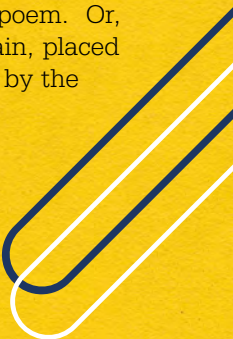
Children could decide what the secret is and write their own poem! Who or what might they have heard this secret from? And then, working backwards, who or what might have told them? Once they have a list of four (heard it from the trees, who heard it from the sea, who heard it from the wind, who heard it from the moon), they have their four lines! Reverse the order to create a poem that mirror's Val's poem, making sure that lines 2 and 4 rhyme.


Val's second verse could be tagged on just as it is to create a new poem. Or, to create a group poem, Val's second verse could be used as a refrain, placed between several versions, each with a different secret, only known by the children who had written the poem.

### Draw

Ken has chosen to illustrate the keeper of the secret. Since the child is the holder of the secret, the illustration could be a self-portrait.

Val's poem's imagery is very vivid and many aspects of it lend themselves to illustration. Draw a picture of the moon telling the wind, wind telling the sea ... or select one of the lines the children write themselves.





**This resource has been created by the Manchester Children's Book Festival. Together with the Manchester Poetry Library, we were delighted to host the official launch of 'Stars with Flaming Tails' with Valerie Bloom, Ken Wilson-Max and Charlotte Hacking (CLPE)**

**If you use this resource, please tell us how and share your own ideas. You can tag us on Twitter [@MCBFestival](#) [@McrPoetryLibrary](#) or email [k.tew@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:k.tew@mmu.ac.uk)**

**Thanks to OtterBarry Books for permission to use poems and illustrations from 'Stars with Flaming Tails' and also for the video links provided in this resource. The book can be purchased from [www.otterbarrybooks.com/books/stars-with-flaming-tails](http://www.otterbarrybooks.com/books/stars-with-flaming-tails)**

### **Find out more**

[mcbf.org.uk](http://mcbf.org.uk)

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[kenwilsonmax.com](http://kenwilsonmax.com)

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