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## World's worst poems sell at auction

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## THE ARTICLE

Poems written over a hundred years ago by William McGonagall, known as "the world's worst poet," were sold at an auction in Scotland earlier this week for over \$12,000. Despite his unfortunate title, McGonagall's work sold for more than a collection of Harry Potter books signed by author JK Rowling. A poetry collector bought a total of 35 poems written by McGonagall in the nineteenth century. Many of the poet's works were also autographed. McGonagall's poems were so bad that when he read them in public, people threw eggs and rotten fruit and vegetables at him. He was born in Edinburgh in 1825 but did not start writing poems until he was 47. He reportedly once walked 100 kilometres to ask Queen Victoria if he could be her personal poet. The queen was not at home.

Poetry experts have criticized McGonagall for his boring topics, poor vocabulary, his terrible rhymes and his inability to keep his poetry in a proper rhythm. In a 200-page guide to the world's worst poets, 13 pages are just about him. Curiously, he does have a fan club and his work is translated into Russian, Japanese and Romanian. McGonagall had a lot of self-confidence and was proud of his poems. In his autobiography, he explained he had a vision in which a voice inside his head encouraged him to "Write, Write, Write!" In his book, he wrote that he knew of no greater poet than himself. He boldly called his first book of poems "Poetic Gems." The Scottish auctioneer said: "He's still popular now because he's so bad, [so] a lot of people have kept him going."

# WARM-UPS

**1. POEMS:** Walk around the class and talk to other students about poems. Change partners often. After you finish, sit with your partner(s) and share your findings.

**2. CHAT:** In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

*poems / poets / auction / Harry Potter / collectors / autographs / eggs / rotten fruit / boring topics / poor vocabulary / fan clubs / translations / pride / hearing voices*

Have a chat about the topics you liked. Change topics and partners frequently.

**3. MY POEMS:** Are you good at poetry? Write down the first line of a poem about English. Give your paper to another student to complete the second line of your poem, then a different student to complete the third line. Change students until you have six lines. Read your poem to the class. Who has the best, funniest, silliest poem?

line 1	
line 2	
line 3	
line 4	
line 5	
line 6	

**4. READING:** What do you like to read? Rank the items below: 10 = "I can't get enough of this;" 1 = "I never go near this".

\_\_\_\_\_ poetry

\_\_\_\_\_ novels

\_\_\_\_\_ cartoons / manga

\_\_\_\_\_ non-fiction

\_\_\_\_\_ newspapers

\_\_\_\_\_ magazines

\_\_\_\_\_ short stories / essays

\_\_\_\_\_ plays

**5. HEADLINE PREDICTION:** With your partner(s), use the words in the "Chat" activity above to predict what the news article will be about. Once you have your story, change partners and share them. Who was closest to the real story?

**6. POETRY:** Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word 'poetry'. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

# BEFORE READING / LISTENING

**1. TRUE / FALSE:** Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| a. The world's worst poems were written in the 18 <sup>th</sup> Century. | T / F |
| b. The poems fetched nearly a million dollars at a Scottish auction.     | T / F |
| c. All of the poems sold at auction were signed by the poet.             | T / F |
| d. The poet asked a British queen if he could be her personal poet.      | T / F |
| e. Critics say the poet wrote about boring topics.                       | T / F |
| f. The poet's work has been translated into at least 3 other languages.  | T / F |
| g. A voice from the dark told the poet to start writing poetry.          | T / F |
| h. The poet is popular today because his poems are so bad.               | T / F |

**2. SYNONYM MATCH:** Match the following synonyms from the article:

- |                    |                |
|--------------------|----------------|
| 1. a hundred years | a. unlucky     |
| 2. unfortunate     | b. strangely   |
| 3. signed          | c. correct     |
| 4. rotten          | d. autographed |
| 5. reportedly      | e. pushed      |
| 6. experts         | f. a century   |
| 7. proper          | g. decaying    |
| 8. curiously       | h. supposedly  |
| 9. encouraged      | i. jewels      |
| 10. gems           | j. specialists |

**3. PHRASE MATCH:** Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. Poems written over a                | a. walked 100 kilometres |
| 2. his unfortunate                     | b. him going             |
| 3. A poetry collector bought a total   | c. a proper rhythm       |
| 4. people threw eggs and rotten        | d. of 35 poems           |
| 5. He reportedly once                  | e. title                 |
| 6. his inability to keep his poetry in | f. hundred years ago     |
| 7. his work is translated              | g. self-confidence       |
| 8. McGonagall had a lot of             | h. poet than himself     |
| 9. he knew of no greater               | i. fruit                 |
| 10. a lot of people have kept          | j. into Russian          |

# WHILE READING / LISTENING

**GAP FILL:** Put the words into the gaps in the text.

Poems written over a hundred years ago by William McGonagall, \_\_\_\_\_ as "the world's worst poet," were sold at an auction in Scotland \_\_\_\_\_ this week for over \$12,000. Despite his unfortunate title, McGonagall's work sold for more than a \_\_\_\_\_ of Harry Potter books signed by author JK Rowling. A poetry collector bought a total of 35 poems written by McGonagall in the nineteenth \_\_\_\_\_. Many of the poet's works were also autographed. McGonagall's poems were so bad that when he read them in \_\_\_\_\_, people threw eggs and \_\_\_\_\_ fruit and vegetables at him. He was born in Edinburgh in 1825 but did not start writing poems until he was 47. He \_\_\_\_\_ once walked 100 kilometres to ask Queen Victoria if he could be her personal poet. The queen was not at \_\_\_\_\_.

*rotten*  
*reportedly*  
*century*  
*home*  
*known*  
*collection*  
*earlier*  
*public*

Poetry experts have \_\_\_\_\_ McGonagall for his boring topics, poor vocabulary, his terrible rhymes and his \_\_\_\_\_ to keep his poetry in a proper rhythm. In a 200-page guide to the world's worst poets, 13 pages are \_\_\_\_\_ about him. Curiously, he does have a \_\_\_\_\_ club and his work is translated into Russian, Japanese and Romanian. McGonagall had a lot of self-confidence and was \_\_\_\_\_ of his poems. In his autobiography, he explained he had a vision in which a \_\_\_\_\_ inside his head encouraged him to "Write, Write, Write!" In his book, he wrote that he knew of no greater poet than himself. He \_\_\_\_\_ called his first book of poems "Poetic Gems." The Scottish auctioneer said: "He's still popular now because he's so bad, [so] a lot of people have kept him \_\_\_\_\_."

*just*  
*proud*  
*inability*  
*boldly*  
*going*  
*criticized*  
*fan*  
*voice*

## **LISTENING:** Listen and fill in the spaces.

Poems \_\_\_\_\_ years ago by William McGonagall, known as "the world's worst poet," were \_\_\_\_\_ Scotland earlier this week for over \$12,000. Despite his unfortunate title, McGonagall's \_\_\_\_\_ than a collection of Harry Potter books signed by author JK Rowling. A poetry collector bought a total of 35 poems written by McGonagall in the nineteenth century. Many of the poet's \_\_\_\_\_ autographed. McGonagall's poems were so bad that when he read them in public, people threw eggs \_\_\_\_\_ vegetables at him. He was born in Edinburgh in 1825 but did not start writing poems until he was 47. He reportedly once walked 100 kilometres to ask Queen Victoria \_\_\_\_\_ personal poet. The queen was not at home.

Poetry \_\_\_\_\_ McGonagall for his boring topics, poor vocabulary, his terrible rhymes and his \_\_\_\_\_ poetry in a proper rhythm. In a 200-page \_\_\_\_\_ worst poets, 13 pages are just about him. Curiously, he \_\_\_\_\_ and his work is translated into Russian, Japanese and Romanian. McGonagall had a lot of self-confidence \_\_\_\_\_ poems. In his autobiography, he explained he had \_\_\_\_\_ voice inside his head encouraged him to "Write, Write, Write!" In his book, he wrote that he knew \_\_\_\_\_ himself. He boldly called his first book of poems "Poetic Gems." The Scottish auctioneer said: "He's still popular now because he's so bad, [so] a lot of people \_\_\_\_\_."

# AFTER READING / LISTENING

**1. WORD SEARCH:** Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'rotten' and 'egg'.

<b>rotten</b>	<b>egg</b>
---------------	------------

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS:** Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**3. GAP FILL:** In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

**4. VOCABULARY:** Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

**5. TEST EACH OTHER:** Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall how they were used in the text:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ago</li><li>• earlier</li><li>• signed</li><li>• total</li><li>• 47</li><li>• personal</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• experts</li><li>• inability</li><li>• curiously</li><li>• proud</li><li>• voice</li><li>• boldly</li></ul>
--	--

# STUDENT POETRY SURVEY

Write five GOOD questions about poetry in the table. Do this in pairs. Each student must write the questions on his / her own paper.

When you have finished, interview other students. Write down their answers.

	STUDENT 1 _____	STUDENT 2 _____	STUDENT 3 _____
Q.1.			
Q.2.			
Q.3.			
Q.4.			
Q.5.			

- Now return to your original partner and share and talk about what you found out. Change partners often.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.



## POETRY DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a) What did you think when you read the headline?
- b) What springs to mind when you hear the word 'poem'?
- c) Do you like poetry?
- d) Have you read any poetry in English?
- e) What do you think of poems by the world's worst poet selling for \$12,000?
- f) Would you like autographed copies of Harry Potter books?
- g) Why do you think people could throw rotten food at poets in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Scotland?
- h) Would you walk 100 kilometres to ask someone a question?
- i) Who is your country's worst and greatest poet?
- j) Would you like to throw an egg at someone?

*World's worst poems sell at auction - 18<sup>th</sup> May, 2008*  
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## POETRY DISCUSSION

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a) Did you like reading this article?
- b) What topic do you like reading poems on?
- c) Are you good at writing poems?
- d) Do you think poems need to rhyme?
- e) Have you ever joined a fan club?
- f) Are you proud of things you write?
- g) Do you get voices in your head encouraging you to do things?
- h) Is your self-confidence high?
- i) What questions would you like to ask William McGonagall?
- j) Did you like this discussion?

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# LANGUAGE

Poems (1) \_\_\_\_\_ over a hundred years ago by William McGonagall, known as "the world's worst poet," were sold at an auction in Scotland earlier this week for over \$12,000. Despite his unfortunate (2) \_\_\_\_\_, McGonagall's work sold for more than a collection of Harry Potter books signed (3) \_\_\_\_\_ author JK Rowling. A poetry collector bought a total of 35 poems written by McGonagall (4) \_\_\_\_\_ the nineteenth century. Many of the poet's works were also (5) \_\_\_\_\_. McGonagall's poems were so bad that when he read them in public, people threw eggs and rotten fruit and vegetables at him. He was born in Edinburgh in 1825 but did not start writing poems (6) \_\_\_\_\_ he was 47. He reportedly once walked 100 kilometres to ask Queen Victoria if he could be her personal poet. The queen was not at home.

Poetry experts have criticized McGonagall for his boring topics, (7) \_\_\_\_\_ vocabulary, his terrible rhymes and his inability to (8) \_\_\_\_\_ his poetry in a proper rhythm. In a 200-page guide to the world's worst poets, 13 pages are just about him. Curiously, he does have a fan club and his work is (9) \_\_\_\_\_ into Russian, Japanese and Romanian. McGonagall had a lot of self-confidence and was proud of his poems. In his autobiography, he explained he had a (10) \_\_\_\_\_ in which a voice inside his head encouraged him to "Write, Write, Write!" In his book, he wrote that he knew of no greater poet than (11) \_\_\_\_\_. He boldly called his first book of poems "Poetic Gems." The Scottish auctioneer said: "He's still popular now because he's so bad, [so] a lot of people have (12) \_\_\_\_\_ him going."

**Put the correct words from the table below in the above article.**

- |     |                  |                 |                |                 |
|-----|------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1.  | (a) written      | (b) wrote       | (c) writing    | (d) writer      |
| 2.  | (a) name         | (b) title       | (c) heading    | (d) address     |
| 3.  | (a) to           | (b) for         | (c) by         | (d) at          |
| 4.  | (a) by           | (b) at          | (c) on         | (d) in          |
| 5.  | (a) autographing | (b) autograph   | (c) autographs | (d) autographed |
| 6.  | (a) still        | (b) when        | (c) until      | (d) yet         |
| 7.  | (a) poor         | (b) poverty     | (c) poorly     | (d) pour        |
| 8.  | (a) do           | (b) keep        | (c) make       | (d) poem        |
| 9.  | (a) transformed  | (b) transported | (c) translated | (d) transacted  |
| 10. | (a) vision       | (b) sight       | (c) site       | (d) eyesight    |
| 11. | (a) his          | (b) he          | (c) him        | (d) himself     |
| 12. | (a) made         | (b) kept        | (c) stopped    | (d) got         |



# HOMework

**1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

**2. INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find out about William McGonagall. Share what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

**3. POETS:** Make a poster about your country's greatest writers. Show your work to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all have similar things?

**4. WORLD'S WORST:** Write a magazine article about the world's worst living poet. Include imaginary interviews with the poet and a judge who decided (s)he was the worst. Include questions about what is good poetry.

Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Write down any new words and expressions you hear from your partner(s).

**5. LETTER:** Write a letter to a poet. Ask him/her three questions about his/her poetry. Ask for three pieces of advice on how you can write great poetry. Read your letter to your partner(s) in your next lesson. Your partner(s) will answer your questions.

**6. DIARY / JOURNAL:** You are a poet. Write your diary entry for one day in your poetry writing life. Include your thoughts on the things that make you write poetry. Read your entry to your classmates in the next lesson.

# ANSWERS

## TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F      b. F      c. F      d. T      e. T      f. T      g. F      h. T

## SYNONYM MATCH:

- |     |                 |    |             |
|-----|-----------------|----|-------------|
| 1.  | a hundred years | a. | a century   |
| 2.  | unfortunate     | b. | unlucky     |
| 3.  | signed          | c. | autographed |
| 4.  | rotten          | d. | decaying    |
| 5.  | reportedly      | e. | supposedly  |
| 6.  | experts         | f. | specialists |
| 7.  | proper          | g. | correct     |
| 8.  | curiously       | h. | strangely   |
| 9.  | encouraged      | i. | pushed      |
| 10. | gems            | j. | jewels      |

## PHRASE MATCH:

- |     |                                     |    |                       |
|-----|-------------------------------------|----|-----------------------|
| 1.  | Poems written over a                | a. | hundred years ago     |
| 2.  | his unfortunate                     | b. | title                 |
| 3.  | A poetry collector bought a total   | c. | of 35 poems           |
| 4.  | people threw eggs and rotten        | d. | fruit                 |
| 5.  | He reportedly once                  | e. | walked 100 kilometres |
| 6.  | his inability to keep his poetry in | f. | a proper rhythm       |
| 7.  | his work is translated              | g. | into Russian          |
| 8.  | McGonagall had a lot of             | h. | self-confidence       |
| 9.  | he knew of no greater               | i. | poet than himself     |
| 10. | a lot of people have kept           | j. | him going             |

## GAP FILL:

### World's worst poems sell at auction

Poems written over a hundred years ago by William McGonagall, **known** as "the world's worst poet," were sold at an auction in Scotland **earlier** this week for over \$12,000. Despite his unfortunate title, McGonagall's work sold for more than a **collection** of Harry Potter books signed by author JK Rowling. A poetry collector bought a total of 35 poems written by McGonagall in the nineteenth **century**. Many of the poet's works were also autographed. McGonagall's poems were so bad that when he read them in **public**, people threw eggs and **rotten** fruit and vegetables at him. He was born in Edinburgh in 1825 but did not start writing poems until he was 47. He **reportedly** once walked 100 kilometres to ask Queen Victoria if he could be her personal poet. The queen was not at **home**.

Poetry experts have **criticized** McGonagall for his boring topics, poor vocabulary, his terrible rhymes and his **inability** to keep his poetry in a proper rhythm. In a 200-page guide to the world's worst poets, 13 pages are **just** about him. Curiously, he does have a **fan** club and his work is translated into Russian, Japanese and Romanian. McGonagall had a lot of self-confidence and was **proud** of his poems. In his autobiography, he explained he had a vision in which a **voice** inside his head encouraged him to "Write, Write, Write!" In his book, he wrote that he knew of no greater poet than himself. He **boldly** called his first book of poems "Poetic Gems." The Scottish auctioneer said: "He's still popular now because he's so bad, [so] a lot of people have kept him **going**."

## LANGUAGE WORK

- 1 - a    2 - b    3 - c    4 - d    5 - d    6 - c    7 - a    8 - b    9 - c    10 - a    11 - d    12 - b