

Reading Poetry Together

Since the first lockdown in 2020 I had wanted to try running a group for people to come together to read poetry. In January 2021 I had my chance with my new Zoom account for Christmas, and the New Year giving a good impetus for new beginnings.

The aims were simple:

- to focus on finding and sharing poetry by others
- to provide a group which brought people together
- to have, if possible within time constraints, a chance for some chat
- to have fun together listening and reading
- to provide an opportunity to gain confidence and/or practice in reading

I wanted the format to be simple and uncomplicated so that it could be run by groups without a leader.

In all we met on 8 consecutive weeks with an optional theme or themes being suggested, which most people used. Themes included: snow, kindness, song, humour, rhyme and favourites. Attendance at the group was initially by invitation and through my own contacts. I emailed people and also advertised the group on Facebook, posting the Zoom link up there every week, as well as emailing it. At most there were 24 and at least 17, so the numbers were good and consistent.

I led the group with an assistant as Zoom host, and in charge of forming the groups. Every reader had about 3 minutes to read a poem and say a bit about why they liked it or whatever they thought they wanted to say. After 4 or 5 readers there was a short general chat. This chat period needed a bit of help. It's not obvious on Zoom how many people are present, so easy to miss people out. However with a bit of gentle intervention (*e.g. let's hear from some other people this time*) it worked fine. I had thought that the answer to the chat question might be to separate people into rooms to chat. Some groups might find that worked best.

Here are some of the feedback comments:

- The great joy for me has been finding, reading and hearing different poets every week..
- I sometimes feel daunted by social gatherings but everyone made me feel very welcome and appreciated and it caused me no problems.

- On the whole, I have very much enjoyed your "sessions" though at times I found the process of picking a suitable poem a bit stressful - and feeling like a bit of a fish out of water amongst all the poets!
- It's a good idea to have broad themes suggested... I enjoy the chase of looking for suitable poems and also finding out what other people read and/or prefer.
- Having seen other people try to host online events without a second person to help on the practical side of things, I can confirm that you are totally right to have a twosome running things.
- I get the impression that when Zoom itself gives 'the floor' to participants it defaults either to the loudest person or to those who have spoken most. I tried to contribute a point of info to the discussion .. but simply couldn't get into the conversation (and yes, I had unmuted myself).
- It was magic - a real ceilidh.

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