Narrative Poetry Detectives

This poem was written by Walter de la Mare, but is based on a series of older poems, and contains many of their elements in a more detectable form. This makes it consequently well suited to first tries at detective work. We envisaged this work could precede, and build up stamina for working on a whole poem.

Each stanza could be given to a pair or three depending on the size of the class for the initial work, and pairs can join with their ‘next’ verse (the verse cards are letter paired to make this easier) for extending the work. The final, thirteenth verse, could join with verses one and two. Each group in turn can then present their work to the rest of the class.

Activity last updated 1st March 2007
The webaddress for this activity is http://www.collaborativelearning.org/narrativepoetrydetectives.pdf
Narrative Poetry Detectives

As Lucy went a-walking one morning cold and fine,
There sate three crows upon a bough, and three times three are nine:
Then "O!" said Lucy, in the snow, "it's very plain to see
A witch has been walking in the fields in front of me."

Using highlighter pens and a dictionary for checking:
-mark unfamiliar words in one colour and guess their meaning for this poem.
-mark familiar words that seem to have an unfamiliar meanings in another colour and guess the new meanings.
-mark old fashioned words and spellings in another colour.
-now try to write a prose version of the stanza in your own words.

Card A1

As Lucy went a-walking one morning cold and fine,
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Card A2

She looks to left, she looks to right, and in the midst she sees
A little pool of water clear and frozen 'neath the trees;
Then down besides its margent in the crusty snow she kneels,
And hears a magic belfry, ringing with sweet bells.

Using highlighter pens and a dictionary for checking:
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Card B1
Narrative Poetry Detectives

Clear rang the faint far merry peal, then silence on the air,
And icy-still the frozen pool and poplars standing there:
Then soft, as Lucy turned her head and looked along the snow
She sees a witch - a witch she sees, come frisking to and fro.

Using highlighter pens and a dictionary for checking:
-mark unfamiliar words in one colour and guess their meaning for this poem.
-mark familiar words that seem to have an unfamiliar meanings in another colour and guess the new meanings.
-mark old fashioned words and spellings in another colour.
-now try to write a prose version of the stanza in your own words.

Card B2

Her scarlet, buckled shoes they clicked, her heels a-twinkling high;
With mistletoe her steeple-hat bobbed as she capered by;
But never a dint, or mark, or print, in the whiteness for to see,
Though danced she light, though danced she fast, though danced she lissomely.

Using highlighter pens and a dictionary for checking:
-mark unfamiliar words in one colour and guess their meaning for this poem.
-mark familiar words that seem to have an unfamiliar meanings in another colour and guess the new meanings.
-mark old fashioned words and spellings in another colour.
-now try to write a prose version of the stanza in your own words.

Card C1

It seemed 'twas diamonds in the air, or tiny flakes of frost;
It seemed 'twas golden smoke around, or sunbeams lightly tossed;
It seemed an elfin music like to reeds' and warblers' rose:
"Nay!" Lucy said, "it is the wind that through the branches flows."

Using highlighter pens and a dictionary for checking:
-mark unfamiliar words in one colour and guess their meaning for this poem.
-mark familiar words that seem to have an unfamiliar meanings in another colour and guess the new meanings.
-mark old fashioned words and spellings in another colour.
-now try to write a prose version of the stanza in your own words.

Card C2
Narrative Poetry Detectives

And as she peeps, and as she peeps, 'tis no more one but three,
And eye of bat, and downy wing of owl within the tree,
And the bells of that sweet belfry a-pealing as before,
And now it is not three she sees and now it is not four.

Using highlighter pens and a dictionary for checking:
-mark unfamiliar words in one colour and guess their meaning for this poem.
-mark familiar words that seem to have an unfamiliar meanings in another colour and guess the new meanings.
-mark old fashioned words and spellings in another colour.
-now try to write a prose version of the stanza in your own words.

Card D1

“O! who are ye,” sweet Lucy cries, “that in a dreadful ring,
All muffled up in brindled shawls, do caper, frisk, and spring?”
“A witch and witches, one and nine,” they straight to her reply,
And looked upon her narrowly, with green and needle eye.

Using highlighter pens and a dictionary for checking:
-mark unfamiliar words in one colour and guess their meaning for this poem.
-mark familiar words that seem to have an unfamiliar meanings in another colour and guess the new meanings.
-mark old fashioned words and spellings in another colour.
-now try to write a prose version of the stanza in your own words.

Card D2

Then Lucy sees in clouds of gold sweet cherry trees upgrow,
And bushes of red roses that bloomed above the snow;
She smells all faint the almond-boughs blowing so wild and fair,
A doves with milky eyes ascend fluttering in the air.

Using highlighter pens and a dictionary for checking:
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Card E1
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Clear flowers she sees, like tulip buds, go floating by like birds,
With wavering tips that warbled sweetly strange enchanted words;
And as with ropes of amethyst the twigs with lamps were hung,
And clusters of green emeralds like fruit upon them clung.

Using highlighter pens and a dictionary for checking:
-mark unfamiliar words in one colour and guess their meaning for this poem.
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-mark old fashioned words and spellings in another colour.
-now try to write a prose version of the stanza in your own words.

Card E2

"O witches nine, ye dreadful nine, O witches three times three!
Whence come these wondrous things that I this Christmas morning see?"
But straight, as in a clap, when she of 'Christmas' says the word,
Here is the snow, and there the sun, but never a bloom nor bird;

Using highlighter pens and a dictionary for checking:
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Card F1

Nor warbling flame, nor gloaming-rope of amethyst there shows,
Nor bunches of green emeralds, nor belfry, well and rose,
Nor cloud of gold, nor cherry-tree, nor witch in brindled shawl,
But like a dream that vanishes, so vanished were they all.

Using highlighter pens and a dictionary for checking:
-mark unfamiliar words in one colour and guess their meaning for this poem.
-mark familiar words that seem to have an unfamiliar meanings in another colour and guess the new meanings.
-mark old fashioned words and spellings in another colour.
-now try to write a prose version of the stanza in your own words.

Card F2
Narrative Poetry Detectives

When Lucy sees, and only sees three crows upon a bough,
And earthly twigs, and bushes hidden white in driven snow,
Then “O!” said Lucy, “three times three are nine - I plainly see
Some witch has been a-walking in the fields in front of me.

Using highlighter pens and a dictionary for checking:
-mark unfamiliar words in one colour and guess their meaning for this poem.
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-mark old fashioned words and spellings in another colour.
-now try to write a prose version of the stanza in your own words.

Card A3

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