



Light

A National Poetry Day Book

Edited by Gaby Morgan

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POETRY

National
Poetry
Day

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Light – A National Poetry Day Poetry Book

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Introduction

National Poetry Day is a mass celebration, a special day on which all are invited to discover and share the enjoyment of poems. It's a chance to let language off the leash and to relish the sounds that words can make when they are spoken with delight.

We hope that the poems in this book – all inspired by this year's National Poetry Day theme of light – will kindle an enthusiasm for poetry that continues to grow long after the day itself, Thursday 8 October 2015, has passed.

The poems here are the work of the National Poetry Day ambassadors – twelve extraordinary poets who spend their lives thinking of fresh ways to make words resonate. One runs a poetry ambulance, dispensing poems to those in need. One is Poet in Residence at the National Football Museum. One has persuaded fire-eaters, lighthouse-keepers and nuclear physicists to read poems about light aloud in their place of work – and filmed them for the Bristol Big Screen. All twelve visit schools and colleges, scattering ideas and inspiration like seeds in the rooms they enter. By the time they leave, their listeners are poets too.

The tremendous Gaby Morgan of publisher Macmillan asked each of the ambassadors to write a new poem that can be used freely in any context, anywhere, to mark National Poetry Day. They have also each chosen a poem about light by someone else, and explained what it is that makes it so good.

There are lines here for everyone. Why not make them yours? Copy your favourites out, rewrite them to suit your mood, stick them on the walls, speak them in unison, whisper them in the dark – or hide them anonymously in the pockets of your friends as a surprise.

Just let us know what happens next by posting on Twitter with the hashtags #nationalpoetryday or #thinkofapoem. There are more great poetry ideas and resources, including posters to download, on our website: www.nationalpoetryday.co.uk.

Susannah Herbert

Executive Director
Forward Arts Foundation

September 2015

Forward Arts Foundation is a charity that celebrates excellence in poetry and increases poetry's audience. Among its programmes are National Poetry Day and the Forward Prizes for Poetry.

Deborah Alma lives in Powys, has an MA in Creative Writing, teaches at Worcester University and works with poetry and people with dementia. She has worked for Writing West Midlands, leading their *Write Now!* Creative writing groups for children. She is Emergency Poet and editor of *Emergency Poet-an anti-stress poetry anthology*. Her poetry pamphlet *True Tales of the Countryside* is published by the Emma Press.

Roshan

Three quarters of the way into my name,
there's Roshan, roshni, light;
that's about right,
pretty pink shalwar chemise,
the shake of bangles on a wrist,
round mirror chips embroidered
to the hem of my clothes,
my white skin seen tiny times over,
sequins sewn into my childhood.

In Karachi, begum aunties pinch my cheeks,
Naseem Uncle, his prayer-mat on the landing,
scars with smallpox scars;
Wimbledon cousins, pakora, falooda,
Bollywood dancing in front of the TV.

This is my light: a cloth weighted
with five bright beads over an English lamp.
And me now, turning on these lights in the dusk;
I move still with a shake of bells at my feet,
not quite heard, the light
not quite seen.

Deborah Jane Roshan Alma

Inspiration

I am a mixed-race child of a white British father and an Indian mother, and grew up on a council estate in North London.

My Indian heritage is a strong and vibrant part of who I am, but as a white woman it is all but invisible in me these days. I wanted to write something about how I still feel something of being Asian, and it is present in my middle name, which means 'light' in Urdu. It is a slightly sad poem I think!

Writing tips

I really like to muck about with sounds, to think about how words can work in a poem with the words close by. You know? Things like vowel sounds (assonance) and alliteration, and rhymes both inside a line of poetry and at the end of lines. So in my 'Roshan' poem there are a lot of 'igh' sounds. When I notice I've done that accidentally, I might play it up a little!

Another poetry writing tip, if you're ever stuck for something to write about, is to look up some art . . . Go to an art gallery, look at an art book, buy a postcard you love, and then just describe it, lay it out like a poem. This is called ekphrasis, writing from art. Take the piece of art away and, nine times out of ten, you'll have a really brilliant poem.

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

Moonlit Apples

At the top of the house the apples are laid in rows,
And the skylight lets the moonlight in, and those
Apples are deep-sea apples of green. There goes
A cloud on the moon in the autumn night.

A mouse in the wainscot scratches, and scratches, and then
There is no sound at the top of the house of men
Or mice; and the cloud is blown, and the moon again
Dapples the apples with deep-sea light.

They are lying in rows there, under the gloomy beams;
On the sagging floor; they gather the silver streams
Out of the moon, those moonlit apples of dreams,
And quiet is the steep stair under.

In the corridors under there is nothing but sleep.
And stiller than ever on orchard boughs they keep
Tryst with the moon, and deep is the silence, deep
On moon-washed apples of wonder.

John Drinkwater

Brian Moses lives in the small Sussex village of Burwash with his wife, Anne, and a loopy Labrador called Honey. He has been a professional children's poet since 1988. To date he has had more than two hundred books published, including volumes of his own poetry such as *A Cat Called Elvis* and *Behind the Staffroom Door* (both Macmillan), anthologies such as *The Secret Lives of Teachers* and *Aliens Stole My Underpants* (both Macmillan) and picture books such as *Beetle in the Bathroom* and *Trouble at the Dinosaur Cafe* (both Puffin). Over 1 million copies of Brian's poetry books have now been sold by Macmillan.

Brian also visits schools to run writing workshops and perform his own poetry and percussion shows. To date he has visited well over 2,500 schools and libraries throughout the UK. He is also founder and co-director of a national scheme for able young writers administered by his booking agency, Authors Abroad. A new poetry book *Spooky Poems* (co-written with James Carter), a picture book *The Frog Olympics* and his childhood memoir, *Keeping Clear of Paradise Street*, are all due for publication in autumn 2015.

Playing with Stars

Young children know what it's like
to play with stars.

First of all it's a wink and a smile
from some distant constellation,
then it's hide and seek as they disappear
in a cover of cloud.
Sometimes children see how far
they can travel to a star
before familiar voices call them
home to bed.

Like all good games, of course,
you need to use a little imagination
when playing with stars.
More experienced players
can jump over stars
or shake down a star.
Some can trap them in butterfly nets,
but you should always let them loose again.
Stars grow pale and die if you cage them.

Sometimes the stars tell stories
of their journeys across the sky
and sometimes they stay silent.
At these times children may travel themselves,
wandering a line that unravels
through their dreams.
At these times too the stars play their own games,
falling from the sky when there's no one there
to catch them.

Sometimes you find these stars on the ground,

dazed and confused. Be warned though:
even fallen stars may be hot to touch.

Young children know what it's like
to rescue stars, to hold them gently
in gloved hands and then,
with one almighty fling,
sling them back to the sky.

Adults forget what it's like
to play with stars,
and when children offer to teach them
they're far too busy.

Brian Moses

Inspiration

I was in a school once, talking and reading some poems to very young children. I asked the group about what games they liked playing, and one girl answered, 'I like playing with stars.'

That idea was a gift and I knew I'd be writing something. Driving home that evening the lines came tumbling out. The Dictaphone was left on and by the time I reached home I knew I had more than enough lines for a poem.

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

I chose 'Escape at Bedtime' by Robert Louis Stevenson as a companion piece as it is one of my favourites. It also features the idea of stars being brought down to Earth in the lines 'These shown in the sky and the pail by the wall/Would be half full of water and stars.'

Escape at Bedtime

The lights from the parlour and kitchen shone out
Through the blinds and the windows and bars;
And high overhead and all moving about,
There were thousands of millions of stars.
There ne'er were such thousands of leaves on a tree,
Nor of people in church or the Park,
As the crowds of the stars that looked down upon me,
And that glittered and winked in the dark.

The Dog, and the Plough, and the Hunter, and all,
And the star of the sailor, and Mars,
These shown in the sky, and the pail by the wall
Would be half full of water and stars.
They saw me at last, and they chased me with cries,
And they soon had me packed into bed;
But the glory kept shining and bright in my eyes,
And the stars going round in my head.

Robert Louis Stevenson

Chrissie Gittins's three poetry collections for children were named Choices for the Children's Poetry Bookshelf; *Now You See Me, Now You . . .* (Rabbit Hole, 2002) and *I Don't Want an Avocado for an Uncle* (Rabbit Hole, 2006) were also shortlisted for the CLPE Poetry Award. Her third children's collection is *The Humpback's Wail* (Rabbit Hole, 2010). In 2014 Bloomsbury published her new and collected children's poems, *Stars in Jars*. Chrissie has made an hour's recording for the Poetry Archive and she has contributed to *Poetry Pie* and *The Rhyme Rocket* for CBeebies TV. Her children's poems are widely anthologized and feature in *Michael Rosen's A-Z: The Best Children's Poetry from Agard to Zephaniah* published by Puffin. She also writes poetry for adults, short stories and radio drama. Her new children's poetry collection, *Adder, Bluebell, Conker*, will be published by Otter-Barry Books in autumn 2016.

www.chrissiegittins.co.uk

The Shortest Days

for Suze

How dark is the morning,
how dark is the day,
will the sun shoulder
the darkness away?

The cars shine their headlights
at lunchtime,
the dawn stays the same
until dusk, snow sits –
tall hats on the seedheads,
an afternoon dew takes a rest.

How dark is the evening,
how dark is the day,
will the sun soon
shiver the darkness away?

Chrissie Gittins

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

William Blake (1757–1827) may have written this poem after seeing a butterfly. He was a painter and printmaker as well as a poet. He attended drawing school from the age of ten and his paintings hang on the walls of Tate Britain. Do you think it's possible to hang on to joy?

Eternity

He who binds himself a joy
Does the winged life destroy:
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sunrise.

William Blake

Liz Brownlee loves writing about endangered wildlife. She has poems in more than sixty anthologies, on plaques at the animal enclosures at Bristol Zoo and in her book *Animal Magic* (Iron Press). Two further books, one for Macmillan Publishing, written with Jan Dean and Michaela Morgan, and one for Bloomsbury, written with Roger Stevens and Sue Hardy-Dawson, will be published in 2017.

Liz shows images and reads poems about incredible animals while doing workshops at schools, libraries, literary and nature festivals. She also speaks at teaching conferences, organizes poetry retreats, exhibitions and events.

Light as Birds

Birds see shades
to us unseen,
the in-betweens
of every green

and red with blue;
they see UV,
a secret universe
of hue.

No wonder birdsong
overflows, dizzy
with blues of sky.

Bird, is your song
of colour trails?
Is the air, in which you fly?

Liz Brownlee

Inspiration:

I wrote 'Light as Birds' after reading about birds' eyes. We have three 'receivers' of coloured light in our eyes, called 'cones'. Each one is specialized to see a different primary colour of light: red, green and blue. These three colours enable us to see all the colours in the spectrum *visible to us*. Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet, and all the colours they make when mixed together.

Songbirds have an extra cone, which receives another primary colour, ultraviolet or UV light. This means they can see colours we will never see in the spectrum beyond violet. They can also see all these ultraviolet colours mixed with the colours we can see. And they can see shades we can't see of the colours we CAN see!

They live in a different world – this was so staggering to me I had to write poem about it.

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

I chose 'The Owl and the Pussycat' by Edward Lear as it was a poem printed in an annual I received at Christmas as a child.

Poetry seemed everywhere then – there were poems in newspapers and children's comics. I had poetry books of poems collected from newspapers, and read them in annuals like *Bimbo*, *Look and Learn* and *Treasure*.

'The Owl and the Pussycat' was one of my favourites – it had animals in, it was funny and, although I had no idea what a runcible spoon was, it sounded very romantic. I yearned to be able to dance on sand by the light of the moon.

I enjoyed its wonderful imagery all over again with my own children.

The Owl and the Pussycat

I
The Owl and the Pussycat went to sea
 In a beautiful pea-green boat,
They took some honey, and plenty of money,
 Wrapped up in a five-pound note.
The Owl looked up to the stars above,
 And sang to a small guitar,
'O lovely Pussy! O Pussy, my love,
 What a beautiful Pussy you are,
 You are,
 You are!
What a beautiful Pussy you are!'

II
Pussy said to the Owl, 'You elegant fowl!
 How charmingly sweet you sing!
O let us be married! too long we have tarried:
 But what shall we do for a ring?'
They sailed away, for a year and a day,
 To the land where the Bong-Tree grows
And there in a wood a Piggy-wig stood
 With a ring at the end of his nose,
 His nose,
 His nose,
With a ring at the end of his nose.

III

‘Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for one shilling
Your ring?’ Said the Piggy, ‘I will.’
So they took it away, and were married next day
By the Turkey who lives on the hill.
They dined on mince, and slices of quince,
Which they ate with a runcible spoon;
And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,
They danced by the light of the moon,
The moon,
The moon,
They danced by the light of the moon.

Edward Lear

Rachel Rooney is a teacher and poet who has two collections of children's poetry published by Frances Lincoln. The first, *The Language of Cat*, won the 2012 Centre for Literacy in Primary Education Award (CLiPPA) and the second, *My Life as a Goldfish* was shortlisted for the 2015 CLiPPA. She has also written a rhyming picture book, *A Patch of Black* – a tale about night-time fears published by Macmillan Children's Books. She goes into schools as a visiting poet, and has performed at Hay Literary Festival, the Southbank Centre and for the Children's Bookshow.

Six Facts about Light

At dawn, she climbs over the horizon
to slink between the curtains
and rest her head on your pillow.

You might meet her in a forest gap
growing foxgloves,
or waiting at the exit of a long, concrete tunnel.

Her gaze could scorch your drawings,
set light to the hay,
blind inquisitive eyes.

Sometimes, in summer,
she'll reveal the lucky stripes
in the lining of her raincoat.

She can bounce off a full moon,
and land softly at your feet,
before you have counted to two.

On foggy nights, when the bare bulb
blows in an empty room, she is still there.
Blinking in the darkness, like an idea.

Rachel Rooney

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

Hafez was a Persian poet who lived more than seven hundred years ago. I chose this poem for its simplicity, yet it says so much using so few words. It is a poem about love. And how real love never asks for thanks or to have its love returned. Such strong love is brilliant. As brilliant as a sunny day.

It works well with my poem because it, too, describes light as a strong, positive thing. This poem is very old, but even after all this time it still has meaning.

The Sun Never Says

Even after all this time
the sun never says to the earth,
‘You owe me.’
Look what happens with
a love like that.
It lights the whole sky.

Hafez

Michaela Morgan writes all sorts of things, including poetry – mostly, but not entirely, for children.

Bright Spark

Crouched cold in a cave,
Huddled against the night.
What bright spark first made fire? First made light?

A flash that made the world grow,
blazed spirits light, let faces glow.
To see each other. Nod yes, shake no.

Art is possible. Stories can be shared.
Not now so lonely, silent, scared.
We can take flight.

Build a beacon.
Light.

Michaela Morgan

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

My choice of a classic poem about light is part of a hymn by Newman, written in 1833. I spent my school days in a convent – and there were many hymns sung. I found poetry all around me. Not just in books but in songs and games, in playground chants or television ads and in hymns and prayers. This part of a hymn always affected me. I liked the image of being lost and alone in a very dark place – and then seeing a hopeful beam of light... Everyone seems to think childhood is a sunny time with no worries but that's not the case. There are times of fear and trouble and doubt – 'dark times'. I can't remember the whole hymn – just this part of it. This is the part that provided a little beam of light

Lead, Kindly Light

Lead, kindly light, amidst th'encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on!

John Henry Newman

Jan Dean writes poems. Writing poems is wonderfully strange – like playing lucky dip with a barrelful of tigers, raspberry jellies and machine parts. She visits schools where she performs her poetry and then invites the students into her head to play at poem-making.

The sun at midnight

The moon's a mirror
white with light
smooth in the glass
of this still pond.

The pond's a mirror
silver with light
held in black night
deep in deep darkness.

This moon
in this pond
is a mirror shining in a mirror
now look

there's me my face
looking up from the water
looking up from the sunken moon
lit by a sun that's half a world away.

Jan Dean

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

When I was nine or ten, I learned this poem for homework. I still know it by heart. When I first read it, I didn't know what all the words meant. What are 'shoon' and 'casements'? Surely the doves have a shadowy coat not a shadowy 'cote'? Can't this poet spell? And is 'moveless' a real word? Why not just say 'still'?

But as I read the poem aloud, and began to memorize it, the sounds of the words cast a spell. I loved saying 'shoon' – it sounded just like the swish of a silk cloak swirling through the long midnight grasses of the moonlit garden. When I found out that 'shoon' is the old word for shoes, I could hear a whispery footstep every time I said the word. Speaking the poem made me hear the moon walking in the garden. Brilliant.

And casements are a sort of window and it's a clicky word so you can hear the sound of the window latch catch as you speak its name.

Discovering that a dovecote was a birdhouse helped me see the sleeping birds in their pigeon-hole roosts, and in saying 'moveless' I heard the long sigh of the 'oo' in 'move'. It's a breathing out, hissy sort of 'oo' – very secret and slow – just perfect for this picture of the strange moonlit garden.

It's a poem that makes me feel special. There's no one else in it – just the moon and me, and only we can see the amazing silver creatures asleep in the magic of the moonlight.

When I wrote my poem, I tried to capture something of the stillness and magic of being alone in a moonlit garden.

Silver

Slowly, silently, now the moon
Walks the night in her silver shoon;
This way, and that, she peers, and sees
Silver fruit upon silver trees;
One by one the casements catch
Her beams beneath the silvery thatch;
Couched in his kennel, like a log,
With paws of silver sleeps the dog;
From their shadowy cote the white breasts peep
Of doves in a silver-feathered sleep
A harvest mouse goes scampering by,
With silver claws and silver eye;
And moveless fish in the water gleam,
By silver reeds in a silver stream.

Walter de la Mare

Paul Cookson has spent twenty-five years visiting schools, libraries and literature festivals, performing poems, leading workshops, publishing books and making people laugh – and he still isn't tired. *The Works* is his bestselling anthology (over 200,000 and counting) and his latest collection of his own favourite poems is *Paul Cookson's Joke Shop*.

Beware of The Grey

Beware of The Grey
Beware of The Grey
Fading your dreams
And ambitions away

Beware of The Grey
Beware of The Grey
Melting the night time
Into the day

He'll take all the colours
And drain them away
Beware of the evil
Beware of The Grey

Whatever you do
Whatever you say
Keep your eyes open
Beware of The Grey

Don't put off tomorrow
What can be today
Follow your vision
Beware of The Grey

He'll shade all your dreams
And whisper and say
Don't worry – give up
Beware of The Grey

Where there's a will
There's always a way
Little by little
Beware of The Grey

He'll suck out your dreams
And say *It's okay . . .*
Accept second best
Beware of The Grey

Beware of The Grey
Beware of The Grey
Fading your dreams
And ambitions a
w
a
y . . .

Paul Cookson

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

I love this – the words are from a brilliant song by poet, singer, comedian, playwright Mike Harding. He writes brilliant poems for both children and adults and is one of the funniest performers I have ever seen. This is one of the best things he’s ever written.

A bomber’s moon was a full moon – this meant that the pilots could see their targets below but also that the targets could see the planes. His father died in a Lancaster Bomber under a bomber’s moon.

That image of a full moon as an instrument of battle is very powerful.

Bomber’s Moon

’44 in Bomber County
Young men waiting for the night,
In the hedgerows birds are singing,
Singing in the falling light.
And the captain says, ‘Tonight there’ll be a bomber’s moon,
We’ll be there and back underneath a bomber’s moon.
A thousand bombers over the northern sea
Heading out, out for Germany.’

Chalkey White stands at the dartboard,
Curly Thompson writes to his wife,
Nobby Clarke and Jumbo Johnson
Are playing cards and smoking pipes;
And over the hangars rises a bomber’s moon,
Full and clear rising, as the engines croon,
And the planes they taxi out on to runway five
And sail off out into the silvery night.

Sandy Campbell checks his oil gauge,
The Belgian coast is coming soon;
Curly Thompson lifts his sextant,
Lines up on a bomber’s moon
And waves are shining there below a bomber’s moon.
The Lancaster’s flying high below a bomber’s moon
Coming in along the Belgian coast
A thousand silver-shrouded ghosts.

Flak flies up around the city,
Jumbo Johnson banks his plane,
Goes in low and drops his payload,
Turns to join the pack again.
And people are dying there beneath the bomber's moon,
The city's a raging hell beneath a bomber's moon,
And the planes head out towards the northern sea:
Young men coming from victory.

Over Belgium came the fighters,
Flying high against the night;
Curly Thompson saw them coming,
Closing in before he died.
And the young men shot them down beneath the bomber's moon,
Shot them down in flames beneath the bomber's moon;
Young men sending young men to their graves
Saw them down into the North Sea waves.

'83 in Bomber County
Mrs White dusts the picture and she cries:
Chalky White in uniform
Looking as he did the day he died.
And for God's sake no more bomber's moons,
No more young men going out to die too soon,
Old men sending young men out to die,
Young men dying for a politician's lie.

For God's sake no more bomber's moons,
No more young men going out to die too soon,
Old men sending young men out to kill.
If we don't stop them then they never will.

No more – no more bomber's moons.
No more – no more bomber's moons.

Mike Harding

Roger Stevens is a children's author and poet who visits schools, libraries and festivals performing and running workshops. His most recent poetry books for children include *The Penguin in Lost Property* (Macmillan), with Jan Dean; *What Are We Fighting For?* (Macmillan), with Brian Moses; *Off By Heart: Poems for YOU to Remember* (A&C Black); and for younger children, *I Wish I Had a Pirate Hat* (Frances Lincoln). Roger runs the award-winning children's poetry website, The Poetry Zone. He plays in a band and performs his own songs in folk clubs. He spends his time between France and Brighton, where he lives with his wife and a very, very shy dog called Jasper.

I Love the Moon, But

I do, I love the moon
When I'm lying on my bed, that big, yellow balloon
And the stars can't touch it, when it shines so brightly.
But I get to thinking, as I lie there
Waiting for sleep
That its light is a second-hand light
And however much you say you love the moon
It's just a slab of rock
And it means that sleep
is not too far away
And your world is lost, like the passing day
But in the morning
Well, that's different
The sky changes, those colours, subtle at first, but soon . . .
You can't even begin to do the dawn justice
In a poem
As the birds start singing, shouting their noise
It's not a chorus, it's a cacophony of joy
It says, We're here, and the light's back
It's back!
Oh yes, I love moon, but
When the sun comes around again
And the light returns
That's something else!

Roger Stevens

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

Have you ever seen the sun come up early in the morning and gasped in wonder as the brightness spreads across houses and trees? Even though we know that light can be explained by science, the way we humans experience it is often spiritual. And have you noticed how light is different as the seasons come and go? Emily Dickinson captures the effect of spring light as it changes during the day and the effect this has on our feelings.

Think about your hometown or village or city. Note down four places that you know well. Now imagine the effect of the sun lighting up those places in different seasons. Or imagine those places at night, in the moonlight. Or in different kinds of light. Then use those notes as the basis for a poem.

For example, I once lived in the country. Behind our house was a large, sloping field. Standing in it was a huge electricity pylon. We would sometimes see deer too, especially early in the morning. There was only one shop in the village, and that was about half a mile away, next to the small primary school.

And so I might begin my poem by imagining the sun coming up, lighting the field and the grazing deer. I might imagine the shadow of the pylon on the ground, as the sun moves round the sky like a giant sundial. Then maybe I would think about those early nights in October, when children have to walk home in the half-light. And maybe I would finish the poem with moonlight shining on our house. Perhaps I would put myself into the poem, noting how I felt about the different light.

A light exists in spring

A light exists in spring
Not present on the year
At any other period.
When March is scarcely here

A color stands abroad
On solitary hills
That science cannot overtake,
But human nature *feels*.

It waits upon the lawn;
It shows the furthest tree
Upon the furthest slope we know;
It almost speaks to me.

Then, as horizons step,
Or noons report away,
Without the formula of sound,
It passes, and we stay:

A quality of loss
Affecting our content,
As trade had suddenly encroached
Upon a sacrament.

Emily Dickinson

Joseph Coelho is a performance poet and playwright. He has written plays for companies including: Soho Theatre, Polka Theatre, Theatre Royal York, Oily Cart, the Spark Children's Festival, Islington Community Theatre and Pied Piper Theatre Company. His plays have received special note from Soho's Verity Bargate Award and the Bruntwood Playwriting Competition.

Joseph is a writer, performer and co-founder of the Word Pepper Theatre Company with author/illustrator/paper-engineer John O'Leary. Word Pepper's shows, *The Poetry Joe Show* and *Pop-up Flashback*, have toured widely up and down the country with Half Moon Theatre.

Joseph's poems have been published in several Macmillan anthologies including *Green Glass Beads*, edited by Jacqueline Wilson. Joseph has been a guest poet on CBeebies *Rhyme Rocket* where he was beamed up from the Rhyme Rock to perform his 'Bug Poem'. His debut children's collection, *Werewolf Club Rules*, is published by Frances Lincoln and was the winner of the 2015 CLiPPA Poetry Award.

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Light-Bringer

The vaults of gods are hard to break into,
as thin as spider silk, and treasure hooked.
It takes a light-fingered thief's wizardry,
a skill to candle-shadow-flicker-dance.
To conduct through space like star-ray light.

Prometheus, like candles gasping, flicked
as quick as fireworks, cracker-snaps and sparks,
past safes chock-a-block with Higgs Particles.
He lightning-struck past chests of knotted ideas,
his mind a plume of surging thunder-smoke.

He blazed through secret halls of locked delights:
of crystal forest planet hearts,
of spins removed from twirling balls,
of dinosaur extinction theories.
his mind a fizz of fired up flare.

He reaches the deepest vault with lava doors,
he hears the song of fire hidden behind.
Like Einstein nicking the atom.
Like Crick and Watson poaching genes.
Like Hawking pilfering Space-time.

Prometheus unlocks the lava doors,
he squints at beaks of flames and feathered heat,
forgets the naked skin protecting his hands;
he reaches inside and steals a fistful of fire.

Inspiration

I have long been inspired by the Greek myth of Prometheus – a Titan (a godly being) who stole fire from Zeus to give to mankind. I often wondered what Prometheus had to do to steal fire from a god! It must have been much harder than stealing from a bank, and what other treasures would a god have hidden away? The myth of Prometheus is often seen as a parable about mankind gaining knowledge. I wanted to reflect that idea by including some of the great scientific discoveries that have been made such as Watson and Crick discovering DNA, Einstein's theory of relativity (that makes our satnavs work on time in our cars!) and Stephen Hawking's theories on black holes. I was keen to use the language of light throughout the poem to reference Prometheus as the bringer of knowledge or as 'light-bringer', as he is sometimes known. In this poem I have used the regular rhythm of the Iambic pentameter (the same rhythm that Shakespeare often used), which means that each line has this sound or rhythm – ti-tum, ti-tum, ti-tum, ti-tum, ti-tum – but sometimes I break that rhythm to draw attention to important parts of the poem.

Writing tip

I find it useful to think about the different layers of a poem – what is the main layer (theme) 'about'? In my poem the main layer is about Prometheus stealing fire, but what is the second, deeper layer? I wanted it to be about light and knowledge. When you're writing, try to think about the different layers of your poem and how the language you use will reflect those layers.

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

Do not go gentle into that good night

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Dylan Thomas

Indigo Williams is a dynamic poet and performance artist from London. She studied music at the BRIT School for Performing Arts and Technology, and has a degree in Creative Writing and Journalism, and a Writer/Teacher MA from Goldsmiths, University of London.

She is passionate about the ways in which art can transform how we perceive the world and its ability to facilitate critical consciousness. She uses her work to explore these concepts on stage and on the page. Her work has been featured on both national television and radio shows.

Indigo is a full-time spoken-word educator working at a secondary school in south London. She is interested in alternative forms of education and how art can be used not only to inform but to encourage critical thinking in students.

Meditations at Dawn

1

What are the seagulls saying
when they call to each other at dawn,
when they wake me
with their squawking song?
The sun is not here yet
but its beacons proclaim ahead,
and the dark night shakes
the stars from its coat
and the moon yawns
and the birds rise
for the blazing chariot's arrival.
They preach to each other a cheer
and though I do not understand,
the light beckons and I rise with them.

2

A plane drags its long sigh above.
Is that the breath of someone
leaving or returning?
Somewhere this day is an end
but I am here, every breath
a rehearsal for the last.

3

Do the trees outside sleep and wake
like us? They breathe like us so maybe
they unfurl their roots underground
like we stretch our toes under covers?
I want to ask the cheery tree by my window
but it won't speak to me – though I know
it is alive.

4

Somewhere someone has begun
this day praying for help.
I know this, because I've heard
two sirens so far this morning,
each racing with lights
to a wound or a fear.

5

And the day is here finally.
There are footsteps leaving,
gates opening and people talking
like birds, greeting each other
good morning.
There is faith and hope
in the air.

Indigo Williams

Inspiration

This poem is an early morning freewrite pondering on the sounds the morning makes. A freewrite is when a person writes continuously for a set period of time without worrying about spelling, grammar or topic.

Writing tip

End your lines with purpose.

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

The Lights

It's getting dark again,
a closer dark
that's harder to shake off,
and I think of the lightkeepers
in their granite towers,
oiling bolts, winding weights
in the nineteenth century dark –
scrubbing dishes, writing the log,
testing the bulbs
of the twentieth-century light –
the final keeper
climbing down his ladder
in 1998, at the end of the last shift –
the automated switch, the microchip,
monitored in Edinburgh
where two centuries before,

one Thomas Smith
manufacturer of street lamps
sat with an oil flame
and a Scottish map –
I strike a match over dark reefs
where ships would crack,
the year unhooks its old black hat
to have a go at vanishing
the human world.

Miriam Nash

Sally Crabtree started out as a gymnast. At the age of fourteen she won a scholarship to train in Russia and became the youngest ever member of the GB woman's gymnastics team. Since then she has been turning the literary world upside down with her cartwheeling poems and colourful and quirky performances.

It is her originality and creativity that makes her stand out in the world of words (the Greek word for poetry is 'one who creates') and she has been described as 'one of Britain's richest inventions' (Lars Gustafsson, nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature) and 'exhilarating!' (BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour*).

As well as books, Sally loves creating interactive poetic installations such as the Poetry Postie and Poems in a Tin (featured on the shelves of the local Co-Op), the Phone a Poem Phone Box, Sweetshop of Words, Poetry Bingo and her copper Poetree, which began life when she decided to hang some poems on a tree and busk, singing, wearing stilts and doing handstands in the splits. People put enough money in the hat for her to buy lobsters and fizz for lunch and she thought, *This is the life for me!*

She then happened to send a poem to a publisher in the form of a quirky handmade card. The publisher ignored the poem but loved the design and asked her to create some novelty books. Sally was slightly bemused (she thought she was a poet!) but gave it a go – and thus began her career writing and designing books in all shapes and sizes for major publishers. Some had sing-a-long CDs in them and one even rolled across the floor like a ball!

'It was great fun,' said Sally, 'but I was always itching to get back to the words,' and she spent time writing serious poetry that would get her invited to poetry festivals around the world. Now she has finally managed to combine all the things she loves, and she delights in also inspiring others through creativity, showing them that words can carry in their arms one's own amazing ideas and hand them like a present to others – not necessarily just in book form but perhaps as an *objet d'art*, a song, a performance poem, an installation or even as the icing of an edible poetry cake!

Tattoo of Light

The dawn is a ball of cotton wool mist
& it dabs its dew upon the night

Which slips and slides
Like a temporary tattoo

About to reveal its transfer of the light.

Suddenly –
there it is
As night is gently peeled away . . .

a tattooed sun
Shining on the forearm of time.

Time swaggers proudly
Swinging his arm this way and that
Like a
farmer sowing seeds . . .

Everywhere the seed of light is planted and the day grows like a field full of flowers.
The day laughs at such a showing off
And her laughter is Light.

Time's other arm thinks of the moment
When a new moon will be transferred on her skin.
She dreams of stars and endless skies.

Meanwhile the sun is oh so bright!
They all laugh.

These tattoos are so convincing
they could almost be real.
You can hear their laughter even now.

Their laughter is Light.

Sally Crabtree

Inspiration

One morning I'd woken up just before the dawn and decided to go for a walk along the coastal path, which is very close to my house. As the dawn came in, the mist was hanging like a big ball of cotton wool over the field that looked over the sea. It must've stirred a memory in me about temporary tattoos! I had recently done an installation called the Sailors Tattoo Parlour at a sea festival where we had given festival-goers temporary poetry tattoos. We used cotton wool balls to dab the water on them and make the transfers work. We also pretended we were the west wind to blow them dry – it was a lot of fun!

I loved the idea that perhaps the sun really is just a temporary tattoo – that what we think in life is real is perhaps just an illusion. This poem fits in with my idea of making poetry tangible and fun. It will form part of my Poetry Postie post bag, and will be delivered as a little parcel that will also contain a temporary tattoo and a cotton wool ball!

Writing tip

My tip for writing is to find ideas and images that delight you. The poet Dryden said, 'The chief aim of poetry is to delight,' and 'delight' is one of my favourite words. It is of course linked to happiness, but also means 'to be filled with light'. Fill your poems with light, even if you are writing about a serious or sad subject. Illuminate them with the light of your own originality. Be you, be brave enough to be the sun of your own day. Find this light in you and let it guide you to what you love.

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

Light

Light, my light, the world-filling light,
the eye-kissing light,
heart-sweetening light!

Ah, the light dances, my darling, at the centre of my life;
the light strikes, my darling, the chords of my love;
the sky opens, the wind runs wild, laughter passes over the earth.

The butterflies spread their sails on the sea of light.
Lilies and jasmines surge up on the crest of the waves of light.

The light is shattered into gold on every cloud, my darling,
and it scatters gems in profusion.

Mirth spreads from leaf to leaf, my darling,
and gladness without measure.
The heaven's river has drowned its banks
and the flood of joy is abroad.

Rabindranath Tagore

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