



NEWS RELEASE

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National Poetry Day 2020 biggest yet as public appetite to share a poem surges under lockdown

A bumper crop of citizen poet-performers will be the stars of this year's National Poetry Day, after four months of lockdown prompted the public to seek out and share poems on an unprecedented scale.

While online poetry performances by actors Andrew Scott, Patrick Stewart and Helena Bonham Carter have drawn audiences exceeding 20 million since March, the nation's secret poets are responding with gusto to an ongoing invitation to use poems to keep in touch with old friends and make new ones.

After hundreds of libraries encouraged their communities to post their lockdown thoughts and feelings in haiku form with the hashtag #haiflu, the team responsible for National Poetry Day on 1st October are now looking for the UK's most poetic region, measured in the number of local poetry sharing events – performances, open-mics and slams. Already, libraries from more than 50 local authorities, from Fife to the Isle of Wight, are pledged to organise celebrations on the day, both online and off.

The challenge, open to library authorities across the UK, is just one of several initiatives foregrounding poetry's power to connect people, whether in groups or online, from the hugely popular [LoveReading4Kids poetry prize](#), open to children between seven and 11, to Gyles Brandreth's *Poetry Together*, in which primary schools pair up virtually with local care homes to recite poems.

Brandreth's own daily Twitter recitals of favourite poems, many from his anthology, *Dancing by the Light of the Moon*, have drawn 1.65 million views since March. He said: "People have been washing their hands while reciting 20-second poems and lifting their spirits with longer ones.

"It's clear from social media that poetry has had an amazing impact during the pandemic, offering solace and inspiration. People have been reading poetry, writing poetry, learning it by heart. It's been a grim time in so many ways, but there's no question; the pick-me-up of poetry has made a powerful and positive difference."

Francesca Baker, Outreach Officer and Words for Wellbeing Specialist at Lapidus International, the UK-based association where words and wellness meet, agrees. She said: "Whether we are looking for escape through transcendent language, or want to see our

reality made concrete, poetry and writing is a powerful source of encouragement and reassurance that we can get through things, we will make it out of the other side, and we are not alone.

“During Covid-19 and the lockdown, many people have been finding that poetry has been there for them, and we hope they continue to see that words connect us and bring a sense of wellbeing.”

The 2020 campaign to mark National Poetry Day, the UK’s annual mass celebration of poetry in all its forms, highlights a list of 40 inspiring new poetry books from more than 20 publishers, with a focus on the pleasure of participation.

They include *Slam, You’re Gonna Wanna Hear This*, edited by international poetry sensation Nikita Gill, which shares tips from prize-winning performers on bringing audiences to their feet with a snappy set, *Poems Aloud*, edited by best-selling children’s poet Joseph Coelho, and *How to Grow A Poem* by teacher Kate Clanchy, whose teenage students have featured on the BBC, Channel Four and Sky, as well as hearing their words performed by the BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales.

The 2020 recommended poetry books list is bigger than ever before, reflecting a bulge in poetry publishing this autumn, and reinforcing National Poetry Day’s displacement of Valentine’s Day as the occasion to buy and give poems. The steep growth in UK poetry sales in the six years between 2013 and 2019 from £6.7m to £12m+, plus the genre’s appeal to young, diverse audiences has also seen poetry repositioned as an art that provokes debate on issues close to the hearts of the ‘demonstration generation’ – inequality, prejudice and climate change.

The listed poets move seamlessly between written and spoken forms, as dramatists, verse novelists and performers. National Theatre playwright Inua Ellams creates poems of ‘personal and political fury’ in his forthcoming collection *The Actual* (Penned in the Margins), using his phone between, “writing screen and stage plays...in transit, between, meetings, before I’d fall asleep and as soon as I’d wake up.”

Bhanu Kapil’s new collection, *How to Wash a Heart* (Liverpool University Press), started life as a show at London’s ICA about hypocrisy and hospitality, while *The Lost Spells* (Penguin) by Robert McFarlane and artist Jackie Morris, released in both audio and print form, is one of many upcoming titles showing its audience how to enjoy the natural world through both their eyes and ears.

Poetry’s power to articulate protest is foregrounded in Michael Rosen and Quentin Blake’s spotlight on migration in *On the Move* (Walker Books), anthologist Ana Sampson’s celebration of female freedom in *She Will Soar* (Macmillan), and Marvin Thompson’s reframing of the Grenfell tower tragedy, that draws on both his Jamaican roots and his family life in rural Wales in *Road Trip* (Peepal Tree).

Visitors to the National Poetry Day website have more than doubled since March 2020, further suggesting that many have been finding solace in poetry. A recent [survey by the](#)

[National Literacy Trust](#) found that a fifth of UK children have written more poetry during lockdown, and that those children who write to make themselves feel better are five times more likely to choose poetry than any other form of writing.

Meanwhile, a host of celebrities – including Idris Elba, Thandie Newton and Stephen Fry – have tapped into the public appetite for poetry identified by *Game of Thrones*' Emilia Clarke, who attracted 7.5m+ views for an Instagram video of herself reading, "to ease her soul" from National Poetry Day founder William Sieghart's best-selling anthology, *The Poetry Pharmacy*.

Sieghart said: "Lockdown's shown us how powerful the right words at the right time can be; a shared poem is a way of connecting and feeling close, even when physically apart."

He expects more people than ever before will get behind the campaign, by sharing a poem on this year's theme of *Vision*, with the support of key distributors *Browns Books for Students*, which will post poetry poster packs to 500 schools.

Susannah Herbert, Executive Director of the Forward Arts Foundation, which has organised National Poetry Day each year since it began in 1994, said: "Poetry has shown itself to be a radically innovative art form during lockdown, bringing people together in virtual public spaces and exciting audiences who want to create as well as consume."

"Our favourite lockdown initiative, [Project Haiflu](#) started with one poet's attempt to check how her friends were feeling when life as we knew it stopped in March. Liv Torc asked her Facebook followers to tell her what they'd noticed while locked down, in the form of a haiku – a short three-line poem with a strict 5-7-5 syllable format."

The result has been described on BBC Radio 4's Today programme as, "an emotional snapshot of lockdown Britain", a spectacular collective act of poetry, photography, music and film, involving more than 8,000 crowdsourced haiku by more than 500 citizen poets.

Herbert continued: "The take-up of *Project Haiflu* by more than 300 libraries shows how well adapted poetry is to meet the nation's creative needs in times of uncertainty. We're fortunate to have the support of our talented and dedicated partners and poetry ambassadors, who are passionate about encouraging people to discover and enjoy poetry."

"Our list of National Poetry Day books is the biggest ever with beautifully illustrated children's books and a particularly high representation of young and BAME writers."

Already a host of [free downloadable National Poetry Day resources](#) have been made available to education providers working with children of all ages, in schools and libraries, to help them prepare for the big day. These include lesson plans and activity sheets from The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE), the National Literacy Trust, poet John Hegley, the Poetry Archive, Apples and Snakes, the Poetry Society and First Story, which organises National Writing Day each year.

[Videos from poets](#) including Simon Mole, Malika Booker, Caroline Bird and Karl Nova offer guidance about writing poetry, and encourage children and adults alike to get involved and share a poem on National Poetry Day.

Kate Clanchy will also lead two webinars for secondary school teachers on how to read and write poetry, as well as producing a 12-chapter guide containing modern classic poems and teenage responses, to prompt whole-school participation. And finally, on the day itself, an exclusive new poem is to be released from one of the world's greatest living writers, whose name is yet to be announced.

Herbert added: "We've been overwhelmed by the support we're receiving this year and with such a quality line up of books from such a broad range of authors, we have high hopes that more and more people will discover the sheer joy and sense of community that can come from becoming involved in, and sharing poetry."

To find out more about National Poetry Day and its many elements, events and resources, visit nationalpoetryday.co.uk.

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About National Poetry Day:

National Poetry Day is the annual mass celebration on the first Thursday of each October that encourages all to enjoy, discover and share poetry. As the artform's most visible moment, it showcases the ways in which poetry adds value to society.

This year, National Poetry Day will take place on 1st October 2020, and the theme is *Vision*. We encourage you to get involved with activities nationwide on the day, and to See It Like a Poet.

National Poetry Day generates an explosion of activity nationwide, thousands of amazing events across the UK – in schools, libraries, bookshops and hospitals, on buses, trains and boats – all celebrating poetry's power to bring people together. The day starts conversations, it encourages love of language — and best of all, it's open to absolutely everyone to join in, quietly or noisily in rewarding and enjoyable ways.

Find out more about National Poetry Day's reach, impact and effect on poetry book sales with our handy leaflet, downloadable at nationalpoetryday.co.uk/NPD-2020-Vision-Leaflet.



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The full lists of National Poetry Day titles for 2020 are as follows:

Great New Poetry Books Recommended for You

Antiemetic for Homesickness	Ante, Romalyn	9781784743000	Chatto and Windus (PRH)	23/07/20
The Air Year	Bird, Caroline	9781784109028	Carcenet Press	Out now
Postcolonial Love Poem	Diaz, Natalie	9780571359868	Faber & Faber	16/07/20
The Estate Agent's Daughter	Edwards, Rhian	9781781725832	Seren Books	Out now
The Actual	Ellams, Inua	9781908058782	Penned in the Margins	01/10/20
How to Wash a Heart	Kapil, Bhanu	9781789621686	Liverpool University Press	Out now
My Darling from the Lions	Long, Rachel	9781529045161	Picador	23/07/20
Zonal	Paterson, Don	9780571338245	Faber & Faber	Out now
Grimoire	Robertson, Robin	9781529051117	Picador	01/10/20
Cannibal	Sinclair, Safiya	9781529030235	Picador	01/10/20
Road Trip	Thompson, Marvin	9781845234607	Peepal Tree Press	Out now

Great New Poetry Books Recommended for You and Your Book Group

Staying Human: New Poems for Staying Alive	Astley, Neil (ed)	9781780373904	Bloodaxe Books	01/10/20
Dancing by the Light of the Moon	Brandreth, Gyles (ed)	9780241397923	Michael Joseph (PRH)	Out now
A Little History of Poetry	Carey, John	9780300232226	Yale University Press	Out now
How to Grow your own Poem	Clanchy, Kate	9781529024692	Picador	03/09/20
Life Support: 100 poems to Reach for on Dark Nights	Copus, Julia (ed)	9781788542845	Head of Zeus	Out now
The Fire of Joy	James, Clive	9781529042085	Picador	01/10/20
Tell Me the Truth About Life	Matthews, Cerys (ed)	9781789290998	Michael O Mara	Out now
A Portable Paradise	Robinson, Roger	9781845234331	Peepal Tree Press	Out now
Smart Devices	Rumens, Carol (ed)	9781784107796	Carcenet	Out now
Forward Book of Poetry 2021	Chosen by the judges of the Forward Prizes 2020	9780571362486	Faber & Faber	10/09/20

Great New Poetry Books Recommended for Young Adults

Blood Moon	Cuthew, Lucy	9781406393446	Walker Books	Out now
Slam! You're Gonna Wanna Hear This	Gill, Nikita (ed)	9781529028300	Macmillan Children's	03/09/20
The Girl and the Goddess	Gill, Nikita	9781529104653	Ebury (PRH)	01/10/20
Run, Rebel	Mann, Manjeet	9780241411421	Penguin	Out now
Gloves Off	Reid, Louisa	9781913101022	Guppy Books	Out now
Poems to Save the World With	Riddell, Chris (ed)	9781529040111	Macmillan Children's	17/09/20
She Will Soar	Sampson, Ana (ed)	9781529040043	Macmillan Children's	03/09/20

Great New Poetry Books Recommended for Children

Poems Aloud	Coelho, Joseph (ed)	9780711247680	Wide Eye Editions	Out now
Zombierella: Fairytales Gone Bad	Coelho, Joseph	9781406389661	Walker Books	03/09/20
Fire Burn, Cauldron Bubble: Magical Poems	Cookson, Paul	9781472958150	Bloomsbury Education	17/09/20
Bright Bursts of Colour	Goodfellow, Matt	9781472963543	Bloomsbury Education	Out now
The Book of Not Entirely Useful Advice	Harrold, A.F.	9781526618016	Bloomsbury Children's	03/09/20
The B on your Thumb: 60 Poems to Boost Reading and Spelling	Hillier, Collette	9780711254589	Quarto	01/08/20
The Lost Spells	Macfarlane, Robert (ed) & Morris, Jackie	9780241444641	Hamish Hamilton (PRH)	01/10/20
Poems from a Green and Blue Planet	Mahfouz, Sabrina (ed)	9781444951240	Hachette Children's	Out now
On the Move: Poems about Migration	Rosen, Michael & Quentin Blake	9781406393705	Walker Books	01/10/20
Welcome to My Crazy Life	Seigal, Joshua	9781472972729	Bloomsbury Education	Out now
Super Guppy: Poems for Children	Vendel, Edward van de	9781910139653	The Emma Press	Out now
Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright!: An Animal Poem for Every Day of the Year	Waters, Fiona (ed) & Teckentrup, Britta	9781788005678	Nosy Crow	03/09/20