



JOELLE TAYLOR

# EXPRESSING THE THINGS THAT MATTER TO YOU

## INTRODUCTION:

Poetry is a bridge between people, so when you write about the things that really matter to you it helps everyone understand the world a little better. You might want to write about political events or current affairs, and you might choose to write about those things in relation to your own life. For example, have you experienced racism, or sexism, or economic hardship within your family? When we relate wider social issues to the real lived experience we create empathy, and empathy in turn creates change. It is also powerful to speak about subject on stage that effects a whole community, whether that be rooted in your local area or something that impacts people globally – climate change is a good example of a topic that is both global and local. Whatever you write, write with the whole of your chest. Mean it. Half a poem is craft, and the other half is passion. If you don't tell your truth, who will?

## EXERCISE 1 - WARM UP - THE FURNITURE GAME

Close your eyes and think about yourself as honestly as possible. When you have a strong idea of who you are, answer these questions, beginning every sentence with the words, 'I am a...' Remember that poetry is cinema and your pen is a camera, so move the lens around, zoom in, zoom out, show all the colours and tastes of the poem.

If you were an animal, what animal would you be? If you were a colour, what colour would you be? If you were weather, what weather would you be? If you were a music instrument, what instrument would you be? If you were a type of book, what book would you be? If you were a part of a room, what part would you be? (Example: I am a skinny white wolf howling on top of a tower block)

## EXERCISE 2 - MAIN - THE LIST POEM

Play the list poem *The Correct Spelling of My Name* (via You Tube link below, text in *The Woman Who Was Not There*.)

Discuss – What is the poem about? What techniques are used within it (see below) How is it performed? The list poem is a great way of exploring a series of linked ideas, of using metaphor and simile to best get your message across while employing a strong rhythm throughout. The poem you just watched is about young people the poet met while leading the national youth slams. Many of the young poets had been through extreme hardship and the poem is an honouring of them. The list form meant the poet could focus on individual people who make up a community.

1. Decide on your theme – for example, the young people who use Coventry Boys and Girls Club.
2. Instead of just writing 'the girl who is always hungry at workshops' you can replace it with a metaphor and strong image, like 'the girl whose eyes are empty dinner plates'
3. You can end rhyme each of the sentences
4. Write a 12-line poem (or 16 bar) on a subject of your choice using the list poem technique.

## EXERCISE 3 - DEVELOPING YOUR WORK

1. All writers (poets, authors, songwriters, playwrights) are watchers. Lean into that by carrying a notebook with you at all times, and regularly stopping to observe the small details of life – a character, a way of dressing, the way the light hits the pavement, etc. Everything is important.
2. Develop your list poem into a piece for performance? What extra devices will you use to make the poem stand up and stand out? Do you need more rhymes/ less rhymes? Are your images clear enough for an audience to grasp in the few minutes you'll be onstage? Can you memorise your piece? Can you look an audience in the face?

## GLOSSARY

Simile - when we say something is like something else - eg: he is like a pig.

Metaphor - when we say something is something else eg: he is a pig.

Rhythm - the pulse of the poem. This can be set (iambic pentameter) or free, with the rhythm changing according to the mood of the piece.

## POET BIOGRAPHY

Joelle Taylor founded the national youth slam championships SLAMBassadors through the Poetry Society in 2001, remaining its Artistic Director until 2018. She has written four collections of poetry, and the most recent *Canto & Othered Poems* won the prestigious TS Eliot Prize for Poetry 2021. She was awarded Spoken Word Artist of the Year in 2022.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

### **The Correct Spelling of My Name, Joelle Taylor**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5\\_2kF1wSxs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5_2kF1wSxs)

### **The Best UK Spoken Word**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yv5fggapRwQ&list=PL5VHPQCMkO\\_uxGEK-OaqTH2UA\\_vRGCM9h](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yv5fggapRwQ&list=PL5VHPQCMkO_uxGEK-OaqTH2UA_vRGCM9h)

### **Poets to research:**

Anthony Anaxagoru, Raymond Antrobus, Hollie McNish, Vanessa Kissule, George the Poet, Kae Tempest, Benjamin Zephaniah, Linton Kwesi Johnson

Empowering Young Voices Project – a collaboration between University of Warwick and Coventry Boys and Girls Club with generous funding by the British Academy and Leverhulme Trust

Share your experience of using this resource with young people on Twitter or Instagram @EmpoweringYV

Visit <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/philosophy/research/currentresearch/eyv/> for more information