

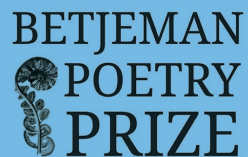


## Key Stage 3

# WHAT IS FREEDOM?

Leisure? Idle hours? Choice?  
Is it exemption, right, liberty,  
unrestraint? Is it power? Or can  
you be free when powerless?

The South African leader Nelson Mandela, who was a political prisoner on Robben Island for 27 years, thought about this question long and hard. This is his favourite poem: *Invictus* by W E Henley. You can hear it read by Morgan Freeman here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7q\\_vACVwq0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7q_vACVwq0)

 BETJEMAN  
POETRY  
PRIZE

This teacher resource was created for National Poetry Day 2017 by the Betjeman Poetry Prize.

Founded in 2006 to mark the centenary of the former Poet Laureate John Betjeman's birth, the Betjeman Poetry Prize aims to foster creativity in young people whilst discovering and encouraging the next generation of British poets.

### Invictus

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll.  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.

by W E Henley

**Try these ideas for class discussion:**

- Notice the rhyme
- Language features: first person perspective, repetition, metaphor ('horror of the shade' ie. Death), simile (black as the Pit), personification ('menace of the years')
- What do these words and phrases mean: 'unconquerable', 'bludgeonings', 'unbowed', 'the menace of the years', 'charged with punishments the scroll'?
- How does the poem make the pupils feel?
- What happens if all the first person words (Me, mine, I) are changed to second or third person? Does it work as well?
- What do the pupils think the word 'invictus' means?
- And why do they think Nelson Mandela recited 'Invictus' to himself every day?

**Get everyone writing freely about Freedom for ten minutes - a story, a poem, a lament or command.**

If anyone's stuck, suggest starting each line 'I am', or 'My'. Like this: 'I am as free as the panther in the woods', or 'My thoughts are my own'.

**Invite pupils to read out what they have written.**

**Finish the class with all the pupils reading Invictus out loud together.**

Maybe they could learn it by heart and recite it at an assembly. Or turn their personal writing into a poem at home.