

# NATIONAL POETRY DAY

25th  
anniversary

3RD OCTOBER 2019

## What We're Up Against

A National Poetry Day resource  
created by First Story

## Key stage 3

**FIRST STORY**  
CHANGING LIVES THROUGH WRITING

**First Story** brings talented, professional writers into secondary schools serving low-income communities to work with teachers and students to foster creativity and communication skills.

By helping students find their voices through intensive, fun programmes, **First Story** raises aspirations and gives students the skills and confidence to achieve them. [www.firststory.org.uk](http://www.firststory.org.uk)

### Injustice

It is the colour red

It is having to go to the toilet in a separate bathroom because of your skin

It's an electric guitar, always playing the solo, always trying to stand out

It is pain

It doesn't have a voice, it's speechless

It's racial, religious and sexual segregation

It is someone who got the job on the phone but then didn't get it in person

It's being treated differently because I am perceived as different.

It is not the colour blue.

It's not piano because that makes everyone feel better

It's not when I see my great gran and know she doesn't feel lonely

It's not raising money for charity, knowing that I'm helping somebody's future.

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[www.nationalpoetryday.co.uk](http://www.nationalpoetryday.co.uk)

This exercise encourages students to be open and draw on personal experiences which can help to produce powerful pieces of writing.

## Icebreaker: What I Am/ We Are Up Against

1. Give each student an index card and ask them to write on one side: 'What I'm up against' and on the other side, 'What we're up against'. They can define 'we' as they wish.
2. Ask them to fill out each side with as many items as they possibly can. Side one might include personal challenges they face: tiredness, dyslexia, racism, PTSD, anxiety, boredom, sexism, a broken heart, for example.
3. Side two might include more general challenges for society as they see it: homelessness, corruption, death, the perils of social media, the weather, climate change.



## Exercise One: What We Care About, and What Scares Us

Ask each student to read an example from each side of their cards. Talk about how this is what the best writing contains - what we care about and what scares us.

Use the different obstacles and ideas that come up to get to know students and help them to get to know each other. Point out connections and similarities.

Discuss the differences between what they as individuals are up against and what 'we' are up against. Who did they mean by 'we'? (Some might have taken it to mean young people, others in society, others in the whole world.) Are there some things we are all up against?

Notice what comes up often, and use as an opportunity to talk about originality, to encourage students to think of less frequently explored ideas, to reveal something of themselves.

**Note:** *Ensure that students only tackle subjects they are comfortable exploring in a group setting.*

## Exercise Two: This Word Is

Ask students to choose one of the words/phrases from the card that is most interesting to them. Encourage students to choose one that is less obvious, and more personal to them, as part of their quest for originality.

Have the students write ten or more things this word is, for instance:

- If it were a musical instrument...
- If it were a colour...
- If it was a type of the weather...
- If it was an item of clothing...
- What is it saying?
- What does its voice sound like?
- What is the volume like?
- How does it make you feel?
- If it were an emotion...
- An image...
- A place that makes you feel safe...

And ten things it isn't, using the same (and your own) prompts, varying these where necessary, for instance:

- A place that you would be afraid to go...
- A type of injury...
- Ask the students to insert 'It is' or 'It's' and 'It's not' where this feels right. Discuss effect of repetition.

Use the poem by First Story Young Writer, Shakur Grant, as an example with students.