



THE EYE CHART

Use this great poem by a partially sighted poet to explore limits.

Key stage 3/4

Scottish
Poetry
Library

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T H E E Y E C H A R T

I scowl towards his voice. He says the map
marks how far vision goes. If I could creep

up close I'd learn the journey. His technique
restricts me to a chair so he can track

how far I travel down the chart alone
before I pause. I grope in the third line –

my limit the next shape I recognize –
then stop. No way. I still believe my eyes

can hold a solar system, catch all lights,
deliver to the doctor alphabets

as small as atoms. But this world is smudge.
I'm huddled at the bottom of the page,

trying to hide my dark. Wherever I am,
I've bypassed every symbol I can name

and stumble at my vision's borders
where letters are illegible as stars.

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NATIONAL POETRY DAY 2020

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READING

What is 'the map?' (l.1) / What is 'the journey'? (l.3) / What is 'my dark'? (l.13)

What do you learn about the 'I' of the poem? And the 'he'? Describe their relationship. How does 'I' feel at the start of the poem? And at the end? Find 3–4 verbs in the poem which describe the narrator's abilities and difficulties.

Each couplet rhymes, in some way. Which end-words rhyme most closely? Which are furthest apart? Why do you think the poet has chosen to use rhyme in this way? Does the layout help you or hinder your understanding of the poem? Why?

DISCUSSION

This is a poem about achievement and failure. Discuss something you can do well. How does this make you feel? How did you become good at it? How will you get better at it? Discuss something you can't do well. How does this make you feel? Would you like to become better at it? Why?

Letters are signs that we use to represent sounds. What other signs do you see around you – in school, at home, in public buildings, in the streets, and so on? Can you think of any signs you don't know the meaning of? Or one that you misunderstood?

WRITING

Write a poem based on 'The Eye Chart', which describes something you can do to some extent, but not as well as you'd like to. Make it the same length as 'The Eye Chart' – 16 lines, broken into 8 couplets, or 4 quatrains. Make it rhyme, but play with half-rhymes too.

Think about how the poem develops:
lines 1–4, describe what it is you're doing
lines 5–8, describe how you feel as you start
lines 9–12, describe your sense that you could be doing it better
lines 13–16, describe your response to that sense

Once you've written it, you could present it visually like 'The Eye Chart' so the text starts large and gradually becomes smaller as the poem unfolds.

BACKGROUND

Nuala Watt lives in Glasgow.

She has cerebral palsy, a visual impairment and epilepsy. She recently completed a PhD from the University of Glasgow on the poetics of partial sight. Her pamphlet *Dialogue on the Dark* was published in 2015.

'Eye Chart' was first published in *Jacket2* (2012), and was included in the third edition of *Tools of the Trade: Poems for new doctors* (2019).

LINKS

www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poet/nuala-watt

www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poem/eye-chart

www.jacket2.org/poems/poems-nuala-watt

www.proletarianpoetry.com/2017/07/17/permission-disability-stairs-and-whispers-and-a-poem-by-nuala-watt



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