

NEWS RELEASE – For immediate release
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National Poetry Day Unveils 'Refuge' as 2023 Theme, Welcomes Acclaimed Poet Lemn Sissay as Ambassador

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National Poetry Day, the annual celebration of poetry, proudly announces its theme for 2023: 'Refuge'. This powerful theme delves into the transformative and healing power of poetry as a sanctuary for both creators and audiences alike.



In an exciting development, the organisers of National Poetry Day are honoured to welcome poet and author Lemn Sissay as its newest ambassador. With a career spanning decades, Sissay has captivated audiences around the world with his evocative verses that explore identity, resilience, and the human spirit.

'Lemn Sissay is not only a cracking poet but also a guiding light in the realm of poetry, using his craft to inspire, comfort and challenge our understanding of the world,' said JAY BHADRICHA, Head of Programmes at Forward Arts Foundation – the charity that runs

National Poetry Day. 'Poetry has the unique ability to provide solace, provoke introspection, and create spaces of refuge within the chaos of our lives, and we couldn't be more thrilled to have Lemn Sissay join us in championing the transformative power of the medium.'

Sissay, who has received numerous accolades for his contributions to literature, including being awarded an OBE in 2021 and the Freedom of the City of London in 2023, expressed his enthusiasm for the role. 'Poetry is how we remember the truth of war and it is how we celebrate peace. Poetry is in our national anthems and in our intimate moments. Poetry is the syntax of the soul. Poetry is the bridge between the physical and the spiritual. It is not a minority sport. It is in the lyrics of Amy Winehouse, in adverts on television, it is read at Weddings and funerals, It is in the West End and theatres around the UK. Poetry is in every musical form from Grime to Opera. Wake up and let the light pour in.'

Both Lemn and National Poetry Day invite everyone – children, young people, families, poets, librarians and teachers – to explore the theme of 'Refuge' on Thursday 5th October. 'What does refuge mean to you?' We'll be asking people to share their versions of Refuge, through writing and sharing of poems on social media using the hashtag #NationalPoetryDay.

LEMN SISSAY says, "Do yourself a favour, instead of telling someone you love them. Find out what they love and then find a poem about what they love and give it to them."

The upcoming celebration promises to be a poignant and enriching experience, embracing the diversity of voices that find solace, strength, and inspiration within the art of poetry.

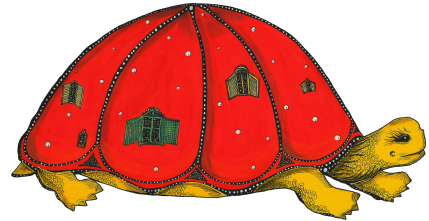
Key activities on National Poetry Day include:

- **New 'Refuge' video:** We have worked with the communications agency, Battenhall, on a video that will encourage people to take part in this year's CTA. The video features an exciting mix of contemporary poets performing their poems and talking about what refuge means to them.
- [Classroom-ready resources for all ages:](#) This year, we've selected poems to share that will appeal to the EYFS stage all the way up to KS5 and beyond. We've specially commissioned resources from CLPE and Secondary school experts.. Combined with a social media campaign spearheaded by Storycatchers we hope to reach new teachers this year.
- [Hot Poets Haiku Futures:](#) Hot Poets' participation project will be launching on NPD. We'll be asking people 'what if the future could be a refuge?'. Each week, The Hot Poets will launch a new theme, based on the UNFCCC Resilience Frontiers pathways, and invite people to submit and share their haiku poetry and photos on that theme through social media. Selected haikus will be shown to changemakers at COP28.
- [Otter Barry & Matt Goodfellow competition:](#) NPD ambassador Matt Goodfellow is inviting 8-11 year olds to write a poem about how you can find refuge or a safe place to express yourself in your voice through your writing.
- [Refugee Action Podcast:](#) Refugee Action have recorded an episode for their Experts by Experience podcast for National Poetry Day featuring Nicola Davies, school teachers and refugees on poetry and refuge.

- The Josephine Hart Poetry Hour will host a [Seamus Heaney celebration](#) at the British Library with his work read by renowned actors (confirmed to read is Ruth Negga).

NPD illustrator, Daria Hlazarova - @dariahlaratova :

To find out more about National Poetry Day and its many books, events and resources, visit national.poetry.day.co.uk.



Notes to editors

ABOUT NATIONAL POETRY DAY

National Poetry Day is the annual mass celebration on the first Thursday of October that encourages all to enjoy, discover and share poetry.

This year, National Poetry Day takes place on 5th October 2023, and the theme is Refuge. National Poetry Day generates an explosion of activity nationwide, thousands of amazing events across the UK – on doorsteps and at kitchen tables, in gardens and streets, in schools, libraries and public spaces both online and offline – all celebrating poetry's power to bring people together.

The day starts conversations, encourages love of language – and best of all, is open to absolutely everyone to join in, quietly or noisily in rewarding and enjoyable ways. As the artform's most visible moment, it showcases the ways in which poetry adds value to society.

ABOUT LEMN SISSAY

Lemn Sissay is a BAFTA-nominated, award-winning writer and broadcaster. He has authored collections of poetry and plays and his memoir *My Name Is Why* was a number one Sunday Times bestseller. His Landmark poems are visible in London, Manchester, Huddersfield and Addis Ababa. He has been made an Honorary Doctor by the universities of Manchester, Kent, Essex, Huddersfield and Brunel, and in 2019 he was awarded the PEN Pinter Prize. He received an MBE in 2010 and an OBE in 2021 for services to literature and charity. In 2023, Sissay was awarded the Freedom of the City of London. He is British and Ethiopian.

ABOUT FORWARD ARTS FOUNDATION

National Poetry Day is run by the Forward Arts Foundation, a national charity supported by Arts Council England. Forward Arts Foundation is a national charity supported by Arts Council England, Bookmark Content, the Charlotte Aitken Trust, the Felix Dennis Foundation and the Garfield Weston Foundation. We showcase the best new poetry and aim to build bigger, more diverse audiences for poetry. Our flagship programmes, National



Poetry Day (6 October 2022) and the Forward Prizes for Poetry, enable all to enjoy, discover and share poetry as performers, writers, listeners and readers.

ABOUT DARIA HLAZATOVA

Daria Hlazatova is an artist based in Ukraine whose works have been exhibited in the United States and the United Kingdom, appearing in numerous publications and on album covers. Her drawings are inspired by fairy-tales, theatre and nonsense. She does not consciously imbue her art with messages, as she believes that purposefully or accidentally, what an artist creates is a reflection of themselves. Hlazatova's goal is to incorporate love into all aspects of the everyday day, which she hopes is evident in her compositions.

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