



# HAND POEMS

A poem written by a prisoner in a writing workshop with poet Russ Litten

## FIRST STORY

Changing lives through writing

This activity was created for National Poetry Day 2017 by Russ Litten, First Story writer-in-residence in Hull.

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### Yesterday and Today

Yesterday my fingers traversed the fingered stump  
Helped a squirrel that couldn't jump  
Pressed the smooth skin, both fascination  
- and alienation

The squirrel lay hurt under the tree  
I helped; it bit; howls of glee  
The fingered stump twirled round and round  
My finger bled and bled in the playground

Today my hand spooned in another cup of coffee  
Carcinogenic beans: "no, no, no", misguided prophesy  
Today my hand will unlock a prison gate  
Spring is here, close to my own release date

Today my hand flicked the switch on a time machine  
Cat Stevens, nostalgia, what could have been  
Today my hand waved hello to my neighbour  
Early morning start, early morning finish; the tied knot of labour.

by Ben H



**Imagine what it would be like to be in prison.**

- Why were you put there?
- What would it be like to be kept in one building for a long time?
- What kinds of activities would you do to pass the time?

**Draw around your hands on two separate pieces of paper and label them TODAY and TOMORROW.**

**On the first piece of paper, write an action on each finger and the thumb.**

This must be an action you might have performed that day that used your hand, e.g. brushing your teeth, putting the radio on, waving to your mate across the landing from your cell in the prison. Then you attach an emotion to each action. How did the music make you feel when you turned the radio on? Did you get a rush of happiness when you saw your mate?

**Then do the same for TOMORROW, but concentrate on the things you would do when you are released from prison that involve your hand, e.g. stroking your dog, driving a car, playing the piano etc.**

Then write down the corresponding emotions, and how it would feel to have been freed.

**Using the notes you have made in each hand, write two poems entitled TODAY and TOMORROW.**

**Or you might want to combine them into one poem, which moves from you being in prison to you being released.**