



## Key Stage 3-5

# FREEDOM OF SPEECH

In 1819, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote the political poem, *The Mask of Anarchy*, in response to the Peterloo Massacre, Manchester. 15 people were killed and hundreds injured when cavalry charged a crowd of people gathered to call for parliamentary reform. Shelley's poem wasn't printed until 30 years later, showing just how explosive it was considered at the time. In it he asks 'What art thou, Freedom?' and then answers his question in these lines:



An activity by Sophie McKeand, Young People's Laureate for Wales, for Literature Wales, the National Company for the development of literature in Wales.

[www.literaturewales.org](http://www.literaturewales.org)  
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### The Mask of Anarchy (extract)

'To the rich thou art a check,  
When his foot is on the neck  
Of his victim, thou dost make  
That he treads upon a snake.

'Thou art Justice—ne'er for gold  
May thy righteous laws be sold  
As laws are in England—thou  
Shield'st alike both high and low.

'Thou art Wisdom—Freemen never  
Dream that God will damn for ever  
All who think those things untrue  
Of which Priests make such ado.

'Thou art Peace—never by thee  
Would blood and treasure wasted be  
As tyrants wasted them, when all  
Leagued to quench thy flame in Gaul.

*by Percy Bysshe Shelley*

Here's a modern protest poem which I wrote using phrases lifted from the national newspapers.  
I don't use the words freedom of speech anywhere in it: but that's the subject.

### Paper News

I am panic  
I am the tearing  
I am nightmarish scenes greeting police  
I am sickened  
I am reviled  
I am dismay

I am flood warning  
I am winter warning  
I am stay indoors warning  
I am severe weather warning  
I am hurricane force winds warning  
I am droughts to hit the south of England warning  
I am hosepipe bans  
I am swimming bans  
I am hotter than anticipated  
I am deserts forming  
I am 50 degrees c in the Middle East  
and they're all going to have  
to move somewhere - warning

I am paper  
I am the test paper  
I am litmus paper

Light the paper  
Spark the fuse

I am justifications for war in Iraq  
I am drones dropping bombs on schools in Syria  
I am the only hospital for 50 miles decimated  
I am collateral damage  
I am screaming for my sister  
I am screaming for my brother  
I am burying my family  
I ululate for my family  
I am the freedom fighter  
I am the terrorist  
I am Muslim  
I am Islam  
I am ISIL  
I am fear  
I am your eyes  
I am your ears  
I am the hot salt of blood and ash  
I am coming for you  
I am coming for you  
I am coming for you

by Sophie McKeand

**Make a poem about a current political topic.**

Take any side of the argument and explore it.

**Remember the 'I' in a poem doesn't have to be you.**

But it's important you feel able to exercise your freedom of speech to share your opinions. Poetry is a powerful tool for this. Form your questions and answer them within the shape of a poem. A list can be a good place to start, or you might begin to shape it more like Shelley - it's up to you.

Excerpt from *Paper News* taken from *Rebel Sun* (Parthian Books).  
Listen to it here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=26gXZwmgZIU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26gXZwmgZIU)