FREEDOM

poetry

Edited by Gaby Morgan
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Andrea Reece</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa Parks – 1st December 1955</td>
<td>Joseph Coelho</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Wear the Mask</td>
<td>Paul Laurence Dunbar</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom Poem</td>
<td>Michaela Morgan</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Windhover</td>
<td>Gerard Manley Hopkins</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It Is Everywhere</td>
<td>Remi Graves</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trees</td>
<td>Joyce Kilmer</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrier</td>
<td>Rachel Rooney</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropping Keys</td>
<td>Hafiz</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free as the Wind</td>
<td>Liz Brownlee</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>Olive Runner</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper News</td>
<td>Sophie McKeand</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mask of Anarchy [Excerpt]</td>
<td>Percy Bysshe Shelley</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom Fighter</td>
<td>Matt Goodfellow</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberty</td>
<td>Edward Thomas</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Caterpillars</td>
<td>Sally Crabtree</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out Beyond Ideas</td>
<td>Rumi</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Who Knew Chrissie Gittins 57
Safe Christina Rossetti 60

Rooftops Brian Moses 62
I Had a Boat Mary Coleridge 66

Of course I am Maid Sophie Herxheimer 68
Marian
I’ll Tell You How the Emily Dickinson 72
Sun Rose

Go Explore the Paul Cookson 74
Countryside
Leisure W. H. Davies 79

That Feeling Jan Dean 81
Go Down, Moses Traditional African-
American Spiritual 84

A Statement of Belief Joshua Seigal 88
There Will Come Soft
Rains Sarah Teasdale 92

Three Short Poems Roger Stevens 94
Three Haiku Issa 97

When I’m Writing Deborah Alma 99
The Owl and the
Pussy-Cat Edward Lear 102

Acknowledgements 104
Introduction

Freedom: whether it’s something you dream of, something you enjoy every day, or even something that you find a bit scary, we’ve all got a strong sense of what it means to us. When we shared ‘freedom’ as the theme of National Poetry Day 2017 with our NPD poet ambassadors, they were immediately eager to explore one of the most powerful words in the English language.

Able to set their imaginations free, they have produced poems with an enormous variety of subjects, starting points and moods. To Paul Cookson, nothing says ‘freedom’ like time spent as a child, freely roaming the countryside, while Sophie Herxheimer revels in memories of transforming 1970s’ London into wild Sherwood Forest. A memory of seventeen caterpillars, escaped and crawling around the kitchen, set Sally Crabtree thinking about her mother, who longed for a freedom we all now hope she achieved. Both of Chrissie Gittins’s parents make an appearance in her poem, in a very unexpected and joyful way. Brian Moses goes running over the rooftops in his poem, taking an exhilarating metaphorical leap in the dark that will leave readers gasping. The physical sensation of freedom is at the heart of Jan Dean’s poem too, and she is also defying gravity,
but by swimming. Roger Stevens takes simple ideas and in three elegant linked haikus gives us lots to ponder. Elsewhere Matt Goodfellow is inspired by the true story of a young boy who fought bravely and successfully for his own freedom. Michaela Morgan encourages us to shout and scream and smile for the freedom within every one of us, while Sophie McKeand rages against the injustices and tyrannies that prevent us from enjoying freedom in the wider world, and Joseph Coelho honours Rosa Parks and the millions she’s come to represent. Joshua Seigal puts the emphasis on personal choice in a stark statement of belief, while Remi Graves’s quiet, dreamy musing on freedom, ‘It Is Everywhere’, leaves us both calm and energized. Deborah Alma finds freedom in the act of writing itself, and Rachel Rooney cleverly and playfully demonstrates how words are the tools that will break us out of the most repressive prison.

Alongside the wonderful brand-new poems written specially by our Ambassadors for this National Poetry Day book, you’ll also find the poems that have provided them with inspiration. Percy Bysshe Shelley’s stirring anthem for freedom and democracy, ‘The Mask of Anarchy’, is included, of course, alongside First World War poet Edward Thomas’s beautiful contemplation
‘Liberty’, together with Mary Coleridge’s soaring little poem ‘I Had a Boat’, which dares us all to set ourselves free. Look out too for a poem by the fourteenth-century Persian poet Hafiz, chosen by Rachel Rooney: a simple, direct and positive poem about empowerment, it sits perfectly alongside her new poem.

Thank you to poetry editor-par-excellence Gaby Morgan for producing this collection, and to the Forward Arts Foundation for supporting it. And now, what are you waiting for? Start reading and enjoy some freedom to think.

Andrea Reece, National Poetry Day Manager 2017
Joseph Coelho is a performance poet and playwright. He has written plays for companies including Soho Theatre, Polka Theatre, Theatre Royal York, Oily Cart, The Spark Children’s Festival, Islington Community Theatre, and Pied Piper Theatre Company. His plays have received special note from Soho’s Verity Bargate Award and The Bruntwood Playwriting Competition.

Joseph’s poems have been published in several Macmillan anthologies, including Green Glass Beads, edited by Jacqueline Wilson. Joseph has been a guest poet on CBeebies Rhyme Rocket, where he was beamed up from The Rhyme Rock to perform his ‘Bug Poem’. His debut children’s collection Werewolf Club Rules! is published by Frances Lincoln and was the winner of the 2015 Centre for Literacy in Primary Education Poetry Award (CLiPPA).
Rosa Parks – 1st December 1955
Lillie Mae Bradford – 11th May 1955
Claudette Colvin – 2nd March 1955

Not the first to sit.
Not the first to get arrested.
Not old (she was 42).
Not tired (‘just tired of giving in‘).

One of many, unable to sit
with the injustice of years.
A rider on an old road
walked by millions on tired legs.

These riders fought for a feat,
years in the trudging,
of sole-worn protest
walked in frustrated miles
over landscapes of lives.

One day became thirteen months
of continued mapping,
of hitchhiking and car pools,
of walking and tattered shoes,
because the bus
wasn’t going anywhere they planned to go.

Joseph Coelho
Inspiration

I have always been greatly inspired by Rosa Parks’s story of quiet protest and determination. Her simple act of sitting on a bus has, quite rightly, been a mainstay of many history lessons and reflections on the Civil Rights Movement. However, I feel that the focus on this one act somewhat fogs the actual history.

Rosa Parks was not the first to remain seated on a bus when asked to move. There was a long line of protestors campaigning for their civil right to have equality in a time when buses were segregated, and black passengers had to sit in the ‘black section’ of the bus, or stand to make seats available for white passengers. There were many campaigners and brave individuals, and children like Claudette Colvin, who refused to move seats at the age of fifteen yelling, ‘It’s my constitutional right!’ I was shocked to learn Claudette Colvin’s story and the stories of other individuals like Lillie Mae Bradford who had also refused to give up their seats on the segregated buses.

To my knowledge, Rosa Parks had been the one and only person who had taken this stand. It made me realize that history tends to remember the highlights of events and campaigns, and forgets the
very many small people and events that build up to landmark moments. I wanted to write a poem that celebrated the fact that societal change is wrought through a drip feed of events, of individuals of all ages, making it crystal clear that things have to change. I wanted to write this poem to honour Rosa Parks’s act, but in the context of a movement held by many, and I wanted to remind the reader to question all historical narrative.
I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

‘We Wear the Mask’ struck me as a piece that touched upon the inner imprisonment that we can all feel at times, that notion that we are hiding our true feelings and are instead presenting a mask to the world. It made me think of the lives of those living under the segregation laws in America and the ‘smiles’ that African Americans would have to wear as they went about their day-to-day lives. The last stanza felt especially relevant, as it talks about the vile clay ‘beneath our feet, and long the mile’. This calls to mind the bus boycotts that were a huge part of the Civil Rights Movement. African Americans boycotted the busses en masse, arranging instead to walk or to use car pools. The movement lasted for thirteen months until segregation on buses was made illegal.
We Wear the Mask

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
   We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
   We wear the mask!

Paul Laurence Dunbar
Michaela Morgan is the author of over 140 books, including fiction, non-fiction, picture books and poetry. Her Walter Tull’s Scrapbook was shortlisted for the BBC Blue Peter Award and chosen for the Guardian cultural diversity awards. Her anthology Wonderland: Alice in Poetry was shortlisted for the 2017 Centre for Literacy in Primary Education Poetry Award (CLiPPA). She runs poetry workshops, visits schools and talks at conferences for teachers. Michaela’s hobby is daydreaming. If there were medals for daydreaming, she is convinced she could be a winner.
Freedom Poem

Breathe in
Breathe out
Gasp
Sigh
Scream
SHOUT!
Spread your arms W I D E
And SMILE.
Find yourself. Find your style.
Make yourself tall as tall can be
Do the impossible one time,
Two times,
Three.
And say out loud
I am Free.

Michaela Morgan
Inspiration

Freedom is such a large topic – so where does a huge thing like freedom start? It starts small, with one person: with you. My freedom poem is about having the courage to take the freedom to be yourself, to act in the way that suits you, to have, to feel, to express your own feelings and thoughts.
I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

Nothing says ‘freedom’ quite so clearly, quite so airily as flight. A bird’s flight. ‘The Windhover’ captures the wheeling, the diving, the sweeping, the soaring of a bird in free flight. I love this poem for its music, its rhythms, its sounds – and its exultation. It is a stranger to standard grammar, complete sentences and clarity of meaning. It is an example of writing at its most free.
The Windhover
To Christ Our Lord

I caught this morning morning’s minion, kingdom of daylight’s dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate’s heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird, – the achieve of, the mastery of the thing.
Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermillion.

Gerard Manley Hopkins
Remi Graves is a London-based poet and drummer. A Barbican Young Poet, her work can be found in publications such as Skin Deep, Orlando Zine and NON Quarterly. Her past projects include a residency at Croydon Library with Spine Festival, and she most recently held the role of Digital Poet in Residence with 1215.today and The Poetry School. Remi is also one half of Gertrude and Jemima, a poetry and music duo, with South African poet and performer Toni Stuart, who presented their improv piece What the Trees Know at Southbank’s Africa Utopia festival. She is also Elmo’s biggest fan.
It Is Everywhere

Green leaves. Wind kissed.
Closed palms. Fresh hope.

Deep river. Free flow.
No signs. Open road.

Wide sky. Grow wings.
Feel light. Dream big.

No frame. New eyes.
From dark. Find light.

Hug air. Laugh loud.
Breathe deep. Dance wild.

Smile wide. Shut eyes.
Hold chest. Close mind.

Ask cloud. Ask wind.
Ask earth. Ask field.

How to live free?

Hold on. Let Go.
Give trust. Lend heart.
Fall down. Get up.
Eat fear. Drink hope.

Remi Graves
Inspiration

Whenever I feel trapped or confused (usually because of overthinking!), I look to nature for tips on how to relax and be in the moment. I always find that nature is an expert in freedom, and she makes it look so easy. Walking home from the tube station, I usually gawp at trees and the way they dance so freely in the wind, or watch birds skydive off buildings without hesitation. For me these are all reminders that freedom can be found in that calm space that nature inhabits. In this poem, I wanted to pay homage to nature and explore the way it teaches us to be free each day.

Prompts and Activities

What do you think about the rhythm of the poem? What does it make you think of? How does the layout of the poem on the page impact how you read it? Would the poem feel different to you if it was all one side of the page?

Play around with the line breaks and positioning of the stanzas to see if you can create a poem with a new meaning!

What lessons can you learn from nature? Do you see freedom in the way rivers flow or how rain
starts and stops as it pleases? Write a list of ten instances in nature that symbolize freedom to you. Can you pick one and generate a poem from it? Use ‘It Is Everywhere’ as a starting point if it helps.
I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

I love the simple rhythm of this poem and the way it shows so much respect to the tree. I’m inspired by the way the poet describes a loving relationship between the Tree, the Earth and (the poet’s version of) God. As I’ve grown up, seeing the messages that nature has to offer us has helped me let go of ideas and ways of thinking that keep me trapped. Joyce Kilmer’s poem explores how a tree can embrace the positive (summer in her hair), and live despite the negative (who lives intimately with rain), and seems to be saying we must accept both to blossom. The poet captures a simple reverence for nature that I find really inspiring – I hope you do too!
Trees

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.

A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth’s sweet flowing breast;

A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;

A tree that may in summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;

Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me
But only God can make a tree.

Joyce Kilmer
**Rachel Rooney** is a teacher and children’s poet. Her work has been published in numerous anthologies. In 2011, her collection *The Language of Cat* won the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education Poetry Award (CLiPPA) and was longlisted for the Carnegie Medal. Her latest collection, *My Life as a Goldfish*, was shortlisted for the CLiPPA 2015. Her next collection, *A Kid in My Class*, will be published by Otter-Barry Books in 2018. She visits schools for workshops with pupils, and has performed her work at festivals and for The Children’s Bookshow. She was Chair of Judges for CLiPPA 2017.
Barrier

Rachel Rooney
Inspiration

I was thinking about the concept of *freedom*, and decided that freedom couldn’t exist without a barrier to prevent or restrict it. I was playing around with these words on my computer, and this led to a concrete poem.
I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

It is written by Hafiz, a fourteenth-century Sufi poet. Hafiz says that a wise person doesn’t try to control and contain others, but instead gives them the tools needed to improve their own lives. I chose this poem because it is a simple, direct and positive poem about empowerment.
Dropping Keys

The small man
Builds cages for everyone
He
Knows.
While the sage,
Who has to duck his head
When the moon is low,
Keeps dropping keys all night long
For the
Beautiful
Rowdy
Prisoners.

Hafiz
**Liz Brownlee** loves writing about wildlife, the subject of her book *Animal Magic* (Iron Press). She’s also written *Reaching the Stars: Poems about Extraordinary Women and Girls* (Macmillan Children’s Books) with Jan Dean and Michaela Morgan; *The Same Inside: Poems about Friendship and Empathy* (Macmillan Children’s Books), written with Matt Goodfellow and Roger Stevens (which will be out January 2018); and *Apes to Zebras: An A–Z of Shape Poems* (Bloomsbury) with Roger Stevens and Sue Hardy-Dawson (due out March 2018).

Liz does readings and workshops on all the above books at schools, libraries, literary and nature festivals. She also speaks at teaching conferences, organizes poetry retreats, exhibitions and events, and runs the poetry website Poetry Roundabout.
Free as the Wind

It’s slight and likes
to infiltrate
makes supple grasses
susurrate

it’s heavy and ready
to hurricane
power the storm clouds
splatter the rain

it swirls in the sand
bends barleycorn
dances the flowers’ heads
round the lawn

it flattens the trees
crack-clatters the bins
rat-tatters in dreams
sets leaves into spins

it slivers in houses
to whistle and haunt
makes the bare branches
jazz-hand and jaunt
it batters and scatters
the litter around
grapplies the shadows
for space on the ground

it smooths unsmooth stones
whips away words
scattering syllables
dishevelling birds

it cannot be summoned
or seen or confined
as restless as waiting
as careless as time

it gusts from a suddenness
cannot be pinned
for nothing is free as
as free as the wind

Liz Brownlee
The wind could be like a sensory poem, starting off gently to remind you it’s there, waking your skin and tickling the hairs on the back of your neck, and while you are enjoying the sensation buffeting you with a sideswipe of an awakening, entering all the nooks and crannies of your clothes, seeking your memories where the wind was nagging in the background, trying to tell you something you couldn’t quite catch, and then sailing away just before you grasp its meaning to leave you in the vacuum of its wake, maybe having found a memory, or a meaning, maybe leaving you wondering if it really happened at all. I love that the wind’s essence is freedom of movement – it really is only movement, and the sounds that movement makes – and this was the inspiration for the poem.
I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

I chose Olive Runner’s poem for the buoyant feeling it gives me of unlimited possibilities, a lightening of heart and soul that starts at the beginning of a journey of opportunities; it’s a feeling I used to have many times as a child, whether I was on a train, or in the fields, or even in bed, feeling my being rise out of myself as I went to sleep.
Freedom

Give me the long, straight road before me,
   A clear, cold day with a nipping air,
Tall, bare trees to run on beside me,
   A heart that is light and free from care.
Then let me go! – I care not whither
   My feet may lead, for my spirit shall be
Free as the brook that flows to the river,
   Free as the river that flows to the sea.

Olive Runner
Sophie McKeand is an award-winning poet and the current Young People’s Laureate Wales. Her work has been published widely including in Poetry Wales, Dark Mountain and The Lonely Crowd. She performs regularly across the UK (such as at the Wales Millennium Centre and with Caught by the River) and has been on stage at the Kolkata Literature Festival, India. Sophie works with various community groups across Wales, helping them to find their voices through engaging with poetry and the spoken word. Her new collection, Rebel Sun, is out with Parthian Books.

www.sophiemckeand.com
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

I am armies of migrant families invading your communities
I am the soft bodies of refugee children washed on
to your shores
I am critical scenes at Dover and Calais
I am young migrant men hijacking lorries
I am children trafficked
I am mothers raped
I am not sorry (it is not our fault)
I am telling you to send them back
I am go home or face prosecution
I am impartial
I am impervious
I am swarms
I am cockroaches
I build barricades
I burn camps
I tear down shelter

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

    Light the paper
    Spark the fuse

I am young black man arrested
I am more young black men shot by police
I am Black Lives Matter
I matter
I am All Lives Matter
I matter
I am unbiased
I am white
I am privileged
I am male
I am single-white-female

I am *papier-mâché*
    Stripped and moulded into
terror

I am gunshots ringing across the playground
I am gunshots fired at police
I am gunshots in the busy shopping mall
I am lone wolf male
I am disturbed white male
I act alone
I speak for no one

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

Light the paper
Spark the fuse
I speak for you
I speak for your fears
I speak so you don’t have to
I tell it like it is
I tell your fortune
I am your problems solved
I am the voice of your wife
I justify your fantasy
I am lap dancers earning ten grand a month
I am sex workers who. love. it.
I am prostitution
I am money
I am the money you want to spend
I am the hours you need to work to matter
I am the crippled NHS
and we all know whose fault that is

I am sick people fiddling benefits
I am the poor who could get a job if they bothered
I am single mothers shelling out babies for your taxes
I am warden
I am judge
I am critic

I am tissue paper for your tears
I am tissue paper for your fantasies
I speak for you
I speak your mind
I am your friend
I am transparent
I am impartial
I am information
I am sensational headlines
I am no editorial bias
I am right-wing-think-tank-expert-opinion
I am the future
I am your present
I write your past
I am right (there is no left)

I am paper trails
I am words
I am the universe in pages
I am your world
I am your friend
I am paper thin
I am paper news
I am news paper

Light the paper
Spark the fuse.

Sophie McKeand
Inspiration

I was thinking about freedom of speech and where it begins and ends in today’s society. The right of the individual to speak their mind is something I strongly believe in, but I wonder if organizations such as our national newspapers have more of an obligation to at least attempt the truth? Perhaps their current output, which is what inspired this poem, is damaging to our communities, and, if so, how could we address this? I’m also exploring how we, as poets, can use our art to highlight issues that are important to us.
I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

’The Mask of Anarchy’ is by one of my favourite poets, Percy Bysshe Shelley. On 16 August 1819, approximately 100,000 millworkers and their families congregated at Saint Peter’s Field in Manchester in a peaceful demonstration of protest calling for reform in the working class’s role. The local ruling class was sent to arrest the leader of the protest, Henry Hunt, and in turn wounded hundreds, and killed a dozen. Shelley wrote this poem in response to the massacre, and he’s my hero for doing so. Poets who use their voice to highlight issues or to speak up for those with no voice are a huge inspiration to me.
The Mask of Anarchy [Excerpt]
Written on the Occasion of the Massacre at Manchester

‘And if then the tyrants dare
Let them ride among you there,
Slash, and stab, and maim, and hew, –
What they like, that let them do.

‘With folded arms and steady eyes,
And little fear, and less surprise,
Look upon them as they slay
Till their rage has died away.

‘Then they will return with shame
To the place from which they came,
And the blood thus shed will speak
In hot blushes on their cheek.

‘Every woman in the land
Will point at them as they stand –
They will hardly dare to greet
Their acquaintance in the street.

‘And the bold, true warriors
Who have hugged Danger in wars
Will turn to those who would be free,
Ashamed of such base company.
‘And that slaughter to the Nation
Shall steam up like inspiration,
Eloquent, oracular;
A volcano heard afar.

‘And these words shall then become
Like Oppression’s thundered doom
Ringing through each heart and brain,
Heard again – again – again –

‘Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number –
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you –
Ye are many – they are few.’

‘And if then the tyrants dare
Let them ride among you there,
Slash, and stab, and maim, and hew, –
What they like, that let them do.

‘With folded arms and steady eyes,
And little fear, and less surprise,
Look upon them as they slay
Till their rage has died away.

‘Then they will return with shame
To the place from which they came,
And the blood thus shed will speak
In hot blushes on their cheek.

‘Every woman in the land
Will point at them as they stand –
They will hardly dare to greet
Their acquaintance in the street.

‘And the bold, true warriors
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‘And these words shall then become
Like Oppression’s thundered doom
Ringing through each heart and brain,
Heard again – again – again –

‘Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number –
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you –
Ye are many – they are few.’

_Percy Bysshe Shelley_
**Matt Goodfellow** is a poet and primary school teacher from Manchester. His most recent collection of poems, *Carry Me Away*, was published in 2016. He spends half his week as a teacher, and the other half touring the UK, visiting schools, libraries and festivals to deliver high-energy, inspirational poetry performances and workshops. He has forthcoming collections with Macmillan and Otter-Barry Books.
Freedom Fighter
(for Jacob, a true warrior)

he doesn’t notice the smell
of disinfectant any more

or the lights
and the feel
of hospital sheets

the wounds
where the hickman line*
was inserted
hurt

but he fights

his face
limbs
body
are swollen by steroids

he is bald

but he fights
three birthdays
pass

a sister is born

friends
in shiny shoes
start school

he watches
others ring the
end-of-treatment bell
on the ward

watches others
who never will

he fights
and he fights

through despair
into hope

and a bell
starts to ring
Jacob’s hand
on the rope

Matt Goodfellow

(* A hickman line is a thin tube inserted in your neck to allow doctors to administer medicine directly into veins)
Inspiration

Jacob Bannister was diagnosed with leukaemia on Christmas Eve 2012, when he was three years and three months old. To help him understand what was happening to his body, his mum and dad, Eleanor and Spencer, told him that the Blood Goblin was making him poorly, and that Jacob was a warrior who needed to fight to be free from the goblin. Thankfully, his treatment was successful and, after three years and three months of treatment, he rang the end-of-treatment bell on the 30 April 2016 to celebrate his victory.

Jacob is the son of my sister’s friends Eleanor and Spencer. As soon as I saw the theme of National Poetry Day, I knew I had to write a poem about this little boy’s brave, and successful, battle against leukaemia and the Blood Goblin – and his fight for freedom. An incredible boy from an incredible family.
I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

Edward Thomas tragically lost his life at the battle of Arras in April 1917. I think this poem speaks for itself – just beautiful.
Liberty

The last light has gone out of the world, except
This moonlight lying on the grass like frost
Beyond the brink of the tall elm’s shadow.
It is as if everything else had slept
Many an age, unforgotten and lost
The men that were, the things done, long ago,
All I have thought; and but the moon and I
Live yet and here stand idle over the grave
Where all is buried. Both have liberty
To dream what we could do if we were free
To do some thing we had desired long,
The moon and I. There’s none less free than who
Does nothing and has nothing else to do,
Being free only for what is not to his mind,
And nothing is to his mind. If every hour
Like this one passing that I have spent among
The wiser others when I have forgot
To wonder whether I was free or not,
Were piled before me, and not lost behind,
And I could take and carry them away
I should be rich; or if I had the power
To wipe out every one and not again
Regret, I should be rich to be so poor.
And yet I still am half in love with pain,
With what is imperfect, with both tears and mirth,
With things that have an end, with life and earth,
And this moon that leaves me dark within the door.

Edward Thomas
Sally Crabtree is an international performance poet and children’s author who has been described as ‘profoundly original – one of Britain’s richest inventions’ (Lars Gustafsson, nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature) due to her innovative approach in presenting poetry to a wide and diverse audience. Some of her trademark interactive performances include The Poetree; I’ll Eat My Words (range of edible poetry); Word M’art (featuring poems in a tin); Phone a Poem; Poetry Bingo; and the Sweetshop of Words. She has recently been ‘On the Rounds’ as the Poetry Postie, delivering poetic inspiration to the nation and beyond, as far afield as Cuba, Japan and China, and was invited by the UN’s Universal Postal Union to deliver poetic inspiration to the Palais des Nations for their 70th anniversary celebrations. Her project for GWR, Song for the Tamar Valley Line, won a national ACORP award. Sally was also once a world-class gymnast – she can sometimes be seen doing cartwheeling poems!
17 Caterpillars

When the 17 caterpillars we had caught
Escaped from the jar
and went crawling round the kitchen,
Mum went mad.

I couldn’t understand it
We lived in chaos so why would she care?
But she did
‘Find them all!’ she screamed, ‘and put them back!’

We found 16
And I’ve been searching
Ever since for that last one
Wondering why she was so cross.

I put it down
to one of following 17 possible reasons:

1. She was ashamed of the chaos
2. She was scared of caterpillars
3. The gerbils had escaped
4. There were too many bills
5. She had had a row with Dad
6. She was in love
7. She wasn’t in love
8. She hated her job
9. Her mother was coming to stay
10. She’d ruined the wash
11. Life wasn’t easy
12. She’d forgotten who she was
13. She was bored out of her skull
14. She’d given up smoking
15. She couldn’t cope with all the responsibility
16. She wanted to be an artist
17. She was scared of doing what she really wanted

I still hope that last caterpillar
became a butterfly
And flew free out of the open window

The most beautiful butterfly in the world.
I hope it was my mother
The most beautiful thing in all the world.

Free.

*Sally Crabtree*
Inspiration

I remember as a child feeling so puzzled as to why Mum had got mad over something as simple as caterpillars escaping from a jar. It was only as I grew up that I realized it wasn’t really the caterpillar that had tipped her – although what it was, I never really found out. I was aware that ‘freedom’ is a funny old word – how do you become free? Do you have to be like that seventeenth caterpillar and seize your chance – find the open window, and go for it? Grown-ups find it so hard to do that – there are so many things we put in the way – a stack of 16 other reasons not to be free. The older I got, the more I understood what my mum might have been going through, and I wish for her that she finally found a sense of freedom. I think she did. The memory of her inspires me to be that seventeenth caterpillar – just find the open window and try to become that butterfly.
I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

This poem reminds me to be free from all that I think I know. I wanted to be a poet because I felt it would allow me to live the freest life possible. As Camus said, ‘The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion.’

However, sometimes as a poet I lose confidence in my rebellion of spirit and find myself worrying about what others think – or whether I fit in with their idea of what is right or wrong. This poem reminds me to use my own judgement – to believe in not just what I think, but beyond what I think. To grasp that there may be ‘more things in heaven and earth [. . .]/Than are dreamt of in your philosophy’ (Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 5, by William Shakespeare). And that it is my job as a poet: to be so free in my soul that I can step towards these things.
Out Beyond Ideas

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I’ll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass, the world is too full to talk about. Ideas, language, even the phrase ‘each other’ doesn’t make any sense.

Rumi
Chrissie Gittins writes poetry for children and adults, short fiction and radio drama. She has five collections of poetry for children. Three were Poetry Book Society Choices for the Children’s Poetry Bookshelf, and two were shortlisted for the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education Poetry Award (CLiPPA). Stars in Jars (Bloomsbury, 2014), her new and collected poems, was a Scottish Poetry Library Recommendation. Her most recent collection Adder, Bluebell, Lobster (Otter-Barry Books, 2016) takes forty of the 110 nature words deleted from the Oxford Junior Dictionary as titles for new poems. Chrissie was a finalist in the Manchester Children’s Literature Prize, and she won the Belmont Poetry Prize for a single children’s poem. Her poems are widely anthologized and have been animated for CBeebies TV. Chrissie has made an hour’s recording for the Poetry Archive, and has read her children’s poems at festivals including Hay, Edinburgh, Wigtown, StAnza, Aldeburgh, Shetland, West Cork, and in the Children’s Room of the Poets House in New York.
Who Knew

Who knew when
two pigeons
flew
down the nave
of St Paul’s Cathedral
in Kolkata
while a Bengali Choir
sang Auld Lang Syne
that flying could become an art in which
we can all partake.

That an egret with his wooden feet
can curve down
a shivering river,
that parents,
made for 51 years
can grow feathers,
and swoop above
a congregation
of disbelievers.

Chrissie Gittins
Inspiration

I was lucky enough to be given an award to visit India last November to follow in some of my father’s footsteps. He was in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War, and he spent time in various parts of India. As I sat in the cathedral in Kolkata, two pigeons flew the length of the nave.
I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

It seems to me you can’t be free unless you feel safe. Christina Rossetti lived from 1830 to 1894. She was one of the most original voices of her century. Many said she should have been Poet Laureate – which would have made her the first female Poet Laureate. It wasn’t to be, and now Carol Ann Duffy is our first female Poet Laureate.
Safe

SAFE where I cannot die yet,
Safe where I hope to lie too,
Safe from the fume and the fret;
You, and you,
Whom I never forget.

Safe from the frost and the snow,
Safe from the storm and the sun,
Safe where the seeds wait to grow
One by one,
And to come back in blow.

Christina Rossetti
Brian Moses has been a professional writer since he stopped teaching in 1988. He has over 200 books published and has performed his poetry and percussion show in over 3,000 schools, libraries and theatres. His latest books include Lost Magic: The Very Best of Brian Moses (Macmillan Children’s Books), Dreamer: Saving Our Wild World (Otter-Barry Books) and his childhood autobiography Keeping Clear of Paradise Street (Candy Jar Books). His website is www.brianmoses.co.uk, and he blogs about children’s writing at brian-moses.blogspot.com.
Rooftops

I’d love to be able to move through a city on rooftops, to take leaps of faith as I jump from one building to the next, to feel like a superhero with zero to frighten me.

How good it would be to race across acres of roof tiles, to slink over skylights, to leap wide canyons of streets on the curve of an arc.

Television crews would assemble with reporters gasping out the news, wondering who this is,
this lone leaper
in the dark.

And me, not knowing
where I’m going,
keeping moving,
thinking, hoping
one day, I’ll meet
another like me
who scoots across
roofs,
checking each time
where he plants
his feet.

Street after street,
 mile after mile,
we’d explore
the hidden places
only helicopter pilots
would have seen.

I’d love the freedom
to move through a city
on rooftops.

Brian Moses
Inspiration

I was in Rome a few years ago, looking down on a panorama of city rooftops, and this, along with my cinematic memories of superheroes, led to the writing of ‘Rooftops’. Maybe, too, it was that envy that many of us have when we watch birds, seeing them take to the sky, enjoying the freedom of flight. How good it would be to experience something of that freedom too. So I wrote about crossing a city from one side to the other by way of its rooftops.
I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

I chose ‘I Had a Boat’ by Mary Coleridge as it is an easy poem to learn, and it echoed the feelings I had when I wrote my poem: that wish to escape and to be somewhere others can’t be.
I Had a Boat

I had a boat, and the boat had wings;
   And I did dream that we went a flying
Over the heads of queens and kings,
   Over the souls of dead and dying,
Up among the stars and the great white rings,
   And where the Moon on her back is lying.

Mary Coleridge
Sophie Herxheimer is an artist and a poet. She created all the images for the last two National Poetry Days! She’s held lots of art residencies, including with the Southbank Centre, the National Maritime Museum, Transport for London, and the Museum of Liverpool . . . Her paintings have been shown at The Poetry Library, The National Portrait Gallery and the Whitworth Gallery, Manchester. She teaches at the Royal Drawing School and The Poetry School.

Sophie made a 350-metre tablecloth to run the length of Southwark Bridge, featuring Londoners’ personal stories about food; a life-size concrete poem in the shape of Mrs Beeton, sited by her grave; a thirty-metre concertina book about a forest; and a giant pie for seven drama students to jump out of singing. She has illustrated five collections of fairy Tales and mythology. Her new book contains poems written phonetically in her late grandmother’s strong German accent, and is called Velkom to Inklandt. She loves painting, drawing, cutting, sticking, baking – and making up poems.

www.sophieherxheimer.com
www.poetryteapot.wordpress.com
Of course I am Maid Marian, 
Who else is there to be?

Filmed in my filmy white dress 
kissed hard by Robin Hood 
against the gnarly tree 
the TV shines Lincoln green.

Friar Tuck and my cat 
get gooseberried 
with the homework 
(page 62, questions 1–10).

Me and Robin Hood 
curl on the corduroy settee 
licking the sugary cement 
out of Bourbon biscuits.

Me and Robin Hood 
roam Battersea 
avoiding pavement cracks 
and fact-checkers.
Around that time we vow to live outside the law like Bonnie and Clyde, me and Robin Hood.

_Sophie Herxheimer_
Inspiration

I always loved stories, and was always on the lookout for an adventure I could imagine myself into. For me, imagination is the greatest freedom; it’s very hard to stop a human being thinking whatever they like. Once you realize how strong and limitless the imagination can be, you can go anywhere and be whoever you feel like being, on your sofa, inside your head, while you do the washing-up, or while your poor teacher explains what outcomes are required . . .

I grew up in the 1970s, and interesting role models for girls were pretty scarce. I didn’t quite know back then that I was free to identify with my hero Robin Hood, so I settled for being Maid Marian, who at least got to hang out in the woods with the boys near the bows and arrows . . . I remember asking my dad what it would mean to be an outlaw. It sounded great. This poem comes from this set of memories, growing up in south London in the 1970s, but at the same time being in Sherwood Forest in the Middle Ages.
I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

Recently I’ve been reading the poems of Emily Dickinson, an American poet of the nineteenth century, who read hugely and loved nature, both of which fed her vivid imagination. She didn’t really go outdoors or socialize for the last twenty years of her life, yet in her poems there is a marvellous breathy freedom that makes the language as alive as bees in a foxglove, or volcanoes full of secret deadly eruptions.

Here is one of her poems that shows her originality. She dispenses with the need for a title and conventional punctuation, and splashes colours around in a landscape using observation and imagination, twin aspects of the artists’ freedom that are actually freely available to all of us.
I’ll Tell You How the Sun Rose

I’ll tell you how the Sun rose –
A Ribbon at a time –
The Steeples swam in Amethyst –
The news, like Squirrels, ran –
The Hills untied their Bonnets –
The Bobolinks – begun –
Then I said softly to myself –
‘That must have been the Sun’!
But how he set – I know not –
There seemed a purple stile
That little Yellow boys and girls
Were climbing all the while –
Till when they reached the other side,
A Dominie in Gray –
Put gently up the evening Bars –
And led the flock away –

Emily Dickinson
Paul Cookson has spent twenty-five years visiting schools, libraries and literature festivals, performing poems, leading workshops, publishing books and making people laugh – and he still isn’t tired. The Works is his bestselling anthology, and his latest collection of his own favourite poems is Paul Cookson’s Joke Shop.
Go Explore the Countryside

A summer’s day, a bunch of friends
Bows and arrows, building dens
Make believe and let’s pretend
All of this and much more when
Finding tallest trees to climb
Leave reality behind
Hide and seek and lots to find
Losing track of space and time
A place to chase and seek and hide
Go explore the countryside

Rope swings over muddy ditches
Stepping stones and building bridges
Snagging clothes on hawthorn hedges
Balancing on stony ledges
Buttercups beneath the chin
Spinning jennies spin and spin
Grass between the thumbs that sing
Dock leaf cures for nettle stings
Hikes to hike and bikes to ride
Go explore the countryside

A piece of penknife poetry
Initialled love hearts there to see
Carved graffiti on the tree
From here to eternity
Flat and smooth skimming stones
Four-leaf clovers, pine cones
Branches look like monster bones
Escape from all the mobile phones
All of these and more beside
Go explore the countryside

Be a cowboy, be a pirate
Let the geography inspire it
Be a soldier, be a knight
Find that stick to fight that fight
Forest shadows, grass that’s high
A place to laugh or shout or cry
Caves and bones and stones and rocks
Blowing dandelion clocks
Imagination – far and wide
Go explore the countryside

Let your dog run and run
Lose your dad and hide from Mum
There is space for everyone
In God’s fairground filled with fun
Time for families to run wild
Find that hidden inner child
A fallen tree’s a crocodile
Lose yourself and stay awhile
Feel the secrets on the breeze
Feel the past within the trees
Eternity in flowing streams
Rugged rocks and crystal seams
In this eternal field of dreams

Go explore, go explore
Go explore – it’s what it’s for
All of this and much, much more
Mother Nature’s superstore
Where geography, biology
And history all collide
There’s majesty and mystery
Passing time for me and you
Lots of things to make and do
Yesterdays or something new
Go explore – you know it’s true
The magic here, the magic there
Take your time to stop and stare
Be sanctified and goggle-eyed
Satisfied and gratified
Come back to
Come back to
The magic of the countryside

Paul Cookson
Inspiration

Sometimes it is a line here or a line there that sparks the inspiration. I’d been thinking about the theme of ‘freedom’ and how to interpret it in verse.

I was going to write about the freedom within books and stories, and how our imaginations run free. Robert Louis Stevenson’s ‘The Land of Story Books’ came to mind, but then one thought led to another . . . and another . . . and I ended up thinking about the freedom of my childhood.

We grew up in the country, and our bikes were a passport to adventure, the fields were our playgrounds, football pitches, battle grounds, and the great outdoors was ours.

W. H. Davies’ poem ‘Leisure’ had been used in an advert, and those rhymes struck a chord. ‘Beneath the bows’, ‘when woods we pass’ conjured up memories of childhood when we all seemed to have the time to ‘stand and stare’.

John Cooper Clarke’s poem ‘A Nation’s Ode to the Coast’ was also used in an advert, and I particularly liked the fact that both poems rhymed but weren’t led down the path of humour because of the form. Rhymes are often a device for humorous verse and poetry, and, much as I love
that, I wanted to explore something different with rhyme and structure.

‘Go Explore the Countryside’ was born. It’s a poem I love reading out loud, and a piece I’m very proud of, in that it works as a performance piece, but also evokes memories of all the things we used to do in those days of freedom.

Someone once said, ‘If a poem doesn’t sound any good when you read it out loud, then it’s not a very good poem’ . . . and I tend to believe that. So – read it out loud, then go and explore the countryside.
I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

**Leisure**

What is this life if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare.

No time to stand beneath the boughs  
And stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass,  
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

No time to see, in broad daylight,  
Streams full of stars like skies at night.

No time to turn at Beauty’s glance,  
And watch her feet, how they can dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can  
Enrich that smile her eyes began.

A poor life this if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare.

*W. H. Davies*
Jan Dean is a poet who loves to visit schools to perform poetry and write in groups. She lives in the South West and swims in the sea whenever she can. Her latest book is Reaching the Stars: Poems about Extraordinary Women and Girls, written with Liz Brownlee and Michaela Morgan (Macmillan Children’s Books).
That Feeling

floating does it for me
I feel free in the sea

you can’t rest on a wavecrest
but still you can pull
through the blue
like the hull of a ship
or the keel of a heron
that’s rowing the sky

to swim is to fly
as weightless as air
in the sea I defy
gravity

I am free in the sea
floating does it for me

Jan Dean
Inspiration

Freedom is such a huge theme – and my two poems reflect that breadth.

‘That Feeling’ is about the physical sensation of lightness and freedom that I get from swimming: it’s small-scale freedom – very personal and very particular.
I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

‘Go Down, Moses’ is the polar opposite of that. A song sung by African-American slaves and used by Harriet Tubman as a code song in the escape system known as The Underground Railway, it is about freedom in a very different sense – the very profound sense of being a human being with full human dignity, not a possession on a par with a farmer’s cattle.

Freedoms of all kinds are precious – even the freedom for a woman to swim in the sea should not be taken for granted.
Go Down, Moses

When Israel was in Egypt’s land,
Let my people go!
Oppressed so hard they could not stand,
Let my people go!

[Chorus]
Go down, Moses,
Way down in Egypt’s land.
Tell old Pharaoh
To let my people go!

‘Thus spoke the Lord,’ bold Moses said
‘Let my people go!
If not, I’ll smite your firstborn dead.
Let my people go!’

[Chorus]

No more shall they in bondage toil
Let my people go!
Let them come out with Egypt’s spoil
Let my people go!

[Chorus]

The Lord told Moses what to do
Let my people go!
To lead the Hebrew children through
Let my people go!

[Chorus]

O come along Moses, you’ll not get lost
Let my people go!
Stretch out your rod and come across.
Let my people go!

[Chorus]

As Israel stood by the water side
Let my people go!
At God's command it did divide
Let my people go!

[Chorus]

When they reached the other shore
Let my people go!
They sang a song of triumph o'er
Let my people go!

[Chorus]

Pharaoh said he'd go across
Let my people go!
But Pharaoh and his host were lost
Let my people go!

[Chorus]
O let us all from bondage flee
Let my people go!
And let us all in Christ be free
Let my people go!

[Chorus]

You need not always weep and mourn
Let my people go!
And wear these slav’ry chains forlorn
Let my people go!

[Chorus]

Your foes shall not before you stand
Let my people go!
And you’ll possess fair Canaan’s land.
Let my people go!

[Chorus]

Traditional African-American Spiritual
Joshua Seigal is a poet, performer and educator based in London. He specializes in working with children, and has two children’s poetry collections published by Bloomsbury, as well as picture books published by Flying Eye. He has performed all over the world, including at the Edinburgh Book Festival and the Sharjah Children’s Reading Festival (United Arab Emirates). His performances always involve talking about his Lhasa Apso dog. Joshua has an MA in Creative Writing and Education, and has held residencies at numerous schools. Visit his fun website at www.joshuaseigal.co.uk.
A Statement of Belief

I believe
it’s OK to have bad thoughts sometimes
I believe
fear is not the same as intuition
I believe
you are not the sum of your exam results
I believe
your IQ does not define your intelligence
I believe
your intelligence does not define your worth
I believe
all reading is good reading
I believe
audiobooks are not cheating
I believe
laughing hard on public transport
is a very good thing
I believe
good teachers make mistakes
I believe
faith can be a virtue
I believe
love often hurts
I believe
we can choose what to believe
I believe
I am frequently wrong
I believe
it’s OK
not to like poetry

Joshua Seigal
Inspiration

This poem is about the choice we all have in deciding the values with which to live our lives. I sometimes use this as the basis for a workshop in which the students can write their own ‘statement of belief’. Note that there are no right or wrong answers: the writer has absolute freedom.
I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

This beautiful poem perfectly expresses the freedom inherent in the natural world. Freedom is also represented in the poem’s use of language, with its mellifluous use of alliteration and powerful adjectives such as ‘wild’ and ‘tremulous’.
There Will Come Soft Rains

There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;

And frogs in the pools, singing at night,
And wild plum trees in tremulous white,

Robins will wear their feathery fire,
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;

And not one will know of the war, not one
Will care at last when it is done.

Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree,
If mankind perished utterly;

And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn,
Would scarcely know that we were gone.

Sara Teasdale
Roger Stevens visits schools, libraries and festivals performing his work and running workshops for young people and teachers. He is a founding member of the Able Writers scheme with Brian Moses, and runs the award-winning poetry website www.poetryzone.co.uk for children and teachers. He has published over thirty books of poetry for children. He spends his time between the Loire, in France, and Brighton, where he lives with his wife and a very, very, very shy dog called Jasper.
Three Short Poems

1
cold rain, grey buildings
in my imagination
white beaches, palm trees

2
to be free as birds
sparrows at a winter feast
pecking at the fat

3
from nine until three
mothers wait behind the bars
Miss looks at her watch

Roger Stevens
Inspiration

In each of the three poems I have written, I’ve taken a simple idea about freedom and tried to present it in such a way that it gives the reader something to ponder.
I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

Kobayashi Issa was one of Japan’s most prolific poets. He left in his journals over 20,000 one-breath poems – then called haikai, but today known as ‘haiku’. He is better known simply as Issa: a pen name meaning ‘Cup-of-tea’.

These three poems all describe a simple, everyday event. In the first, someone, possibly Issa, has caught a firefly. But the firefly manages to escape. In the second, an insect is released from the hand. Despite being released, it bites its captor. In the third, Issa opens the window to release a trapped butterfly. Even though these are very simple poems, each one gives us a lot to think about.

We usually write haiku with seventeen syllables (in three lines of 5, 7 and 5), and with Issa’s poems I’ve included the original Japanese. It might be fun to try saying them aloud and in one breath.
Three Haiku

1
first firefly
though the hand is skilful
slips free
*hatsu hotaru jyôzu no te de mori ni keri*

2
biting the hand
that sets it free . . .
katydid
*hanachi yaru te wo kajiri keri kirigirisu*

3
opening the window
I see the butterfly off
into the field
*mado akete chô wo mi-okuru no hara kana*

Issa
Deborah Alma is the Emergency Poet. She travels all over the place in her very old ambulance (quite slowly) with Nurse Verse, and they share poetry with all sorts of people – at festivals, schools, libraries and other strange places – to help them feel better.
When I’m Writing

Sometimes
I grow things in my mind
so fast that my head spins and falls off.

I have to carry it under my arm for miles.

Or
I travel in my magic carriage
stopping in small towns. Nothing much happens.
No one comes.

By the time I get there,
I am calm, having travelled so far.
I lift up my head and screw it back on,
in an anti-clockwise direction.

Deborah Alma
Inspiration

I was trying and trying to think of a poem about freedom, and got stuck on birds and flying and action . . . but I realized that I was stuck, and that was the opposite of being free! And I remembered what a wonderful feeling it is when I can write a poem and it’s fun and comes easily, and realized that was when I felt really free, wherever I was. This poem is what it feels like to me when I’ve got an idea. And the best thing, if you like to write, is that you can feel free wherever you can write. Even in the bath.
I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

I chose this poem by Edward Lear, who liked to write crazy poems. I have loved it ever since I was little – for its adventurous spirit and its nonsense and playfulness. I think there’s a lot of freedom about sailing away and dancing by the light of the moon.
The Owl and the Pussy-Cat

I

The Owl and the Pussy-cat went to sea
   In a beautiful pea-green boat,
They took some honey, and plenty of money,
   Wrapped up in a five-pound note.
The Owl looked up to the stars above,
   And sang to a small guitar,
‘O lovely Pussy! O Pussy, my love,
   What a beautiful Pussy you are,
   You are,
   You are!
What a beautiful Pussy you are!’

II

Pussy said to the Owl, ‘You elegant fowl!
   How charmingly sweet you sing!
O let us be married! too long we have tarried:
   But what shall we do for a ring?’
They sailed away, for a year and a day,
   To the land where the Bong-Tree grows
And there in a wood a Piggy-wig stood
   With a ring at the end of his nose,
   His nose,
   His nose,
   With a ring at the end of his nose.
III
‘Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for one shilling
   Your ring?’ Said the Piggy, ‘I will.’
So they took it away, and were married next day
   By the Turkey who lives on the hill.
They dined on mince, and slices of quince,
   Which they ate with a runcible spoon;
And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,
   They danced by the light of the moon,
      The moon,
      The moon,
They danced by the light of the moon.

Edward Lear
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