

## National Poetry Day – Truth

### Poetry and Young People

In a world where truth sometimes seems to be in short supply, with fake news, political uncertainty and anxiety about climate change, young people are often our most outspoken, committed seekers after truth and justice, whether it be Greta Thunberg talking to world audiences about global warming, Emma Gonzalez in the USA speaking out against gun crime, or Malala Yousafzai, fighting for girls' education in Pakistan.

Poetry has also been having a resurgence among the young, as a way of expressing ideas and feelings about the world we are living in. So, it seems especially appropriate, with 'Truth' as the theme for National Poetry Day 2019, that we should offer something to students that allows them to read and write poems in response to the questions that seem to them to be the burning issues of the day.

### Responding to Events in the Here and Now – Simon Armitage

Simon Armitage was appointed Poet Laureate in May 2019. His first five poems have been responses to events and issues in the world today. They are all available on his website (<https://www.simonarmitage.com/>) via the tab 'Poet Laureate Poems' or directly from the links below.

We think they would make a great spark for school students to read, enjoy, explore, think about and write poems of their own. Some are available in print only, others have a spoken version or a film version.



1. 'Conquistadors' was written on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first crewed moon landing (PRINT)

<https://www.simonarmitage.com/wp-content/uploads/Conquistadors.pdf>

2. 'Finishing It' was commissioned by the Institute for Cancer Research in recognition of its progress on drug-based cancer treatments (PRINT)

<https://www.simonarmitage.com/wp-content/uploads/ICR-Finishing-It-Poem-Photo-copytouse.pdf>

3. 'All Right?' was written to coincide with Mental Health Awareness Week, as part of a suicide prevention campaign by Northern trains (FILM)

<https://www.simonarmitage.com/poet-laureate-poems/all-right/>

4. 'Fugitives' celebrates the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, which paved the way for the creation of 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the UK. (PRINT)

<https://www.simonarmitage.com/wp-content/uploads/Fugitives.pdf>

5. 'Ark' was written to celebrate the official naming of the UK's new polar research ship, the RRS Sir David Attenborough, performed on BBC Radio 4. (PRINT & AUDIO RADIO 4)

<https://www.simonarmitage.com/wp-content/uploads/Amended-Ark.pdf>

## **EMC's Suggested Activities**

Here are a few suggestions, depending on how much time you have available and the age/stage of the students. You might, for instance, do Approach 1 or 2 with KS3 classes but use Approach 3 with your Year 11s or A Level students.

### **Approach 1 – Reading 'Ark' (45 mins to 60 minutes)**

- a. Ask students to brainstorm things going on in the world that they think would be worth writing a poem about.
- b. Explain to students the context for Simon Armitage's poem, 'Ark'. Listen to him reading it.
- c. Ask students to talk about:
  - their first responses (what they feel, like, are puzzled by, want to know more about etc)
  - what it seems to be saying
  - what use it makes of other stories or texts they've read or know about
  - what they think of it as a way of making a statement about our world.
- d. Ask students to write a poem of their own, either about the same issue or about something else happening in the world that they feel strongly about. They can do it in any way they like, but if they're looking for an idea, they might think about using another biblical story, or a myth (from any culture), or a fairy story or fable and using that to explore an issue in today's world
- e. Let students read their poems aloud if they want to (either in their small groups or as a whole class).

### **Approach 2 – Just Read, Watch, Listen, Talk (15 minutes)**

- a. Select from the 5 poems those that you think are most appropriate for your class, KS3, 4 or 5. It may be several, or it may be just one.
- b. Put aside the first 15 minutes or so of your lesson to do the activity. First explain that it's National Poetry Day, with the theme of 'Truth'. Share the poem(s), in whatever form they are available (text, reading, film).
- c. Hear or watch it/them again.
- d. Ask students to talk about their reactions.
- e. You could suggest that they might like to go away and write a poem of their own inspired by this – not as a homework, nor compulsory. If they do, they can bring it in, either to share with you, or with the class, whichever they prefer.
- f. Next lesson, find out whether anyone has written something, whether they want to share it or not. (This might be an interesting 'experiment' in seeing whether students are keen to write on things that matter to them, even if not required to do so.)

### **Approach 3 – Reading and Talking About All Five Poems (60+ minutes)**

- a. Ask students to read/listen to /watch all of the poems and choose the one they like most.
- b. In small groups, share choices. Why? What interested them most? Which lines did they like best? What made that particular poem stand out for them?
- c. Share the choices as a class.
- d. Ask students to brainstorm things going on in the world that they think would be worth writing a poem about. (It could include the things Armitage has written about).
- e. Ask them to pick one to write about themselves.
- f. Let students read their poems aloud, if they want to (either in their small groups or as a whole class).