

THE UK'S FAVOURITE POETS



TS Eliot



Benjamin Zephaniah



William Blake

- 1 TS ELIOT
- 2 JOHN DONNE
- 3 BENJAMIN ZEPHANIAH
- 4 WILFRED OWEN
- 5 PHILIP LARKIN
- 6 WILLIAM BLAKE
- 7 WB YEATS
- 8 JOHN BETJEMAN
- 9 JOHN KEATS
- 10 DYLAN THOMAS\*\*

When was the last time you read a poem? Was it when you battled to understand

TS Eliot at school, or have you turned to poetry in a tough 2020?

Poetry was initially developed to help people memorise stories and history. The ancient Greeks and Romans were known for their great epics, telling tales of gods and heroic deeds – Homer's *Iliad* has 15,693 verses!

Today's modern 'Insta-poets', who post their work – sometimes as short as a couple of lines – on social media, help capture the human experience. During lockdown, the popularity of poetry soared.

The number of Instagram posts using the hashtag #poetry grew to 48m between April and September 2020.\*

'Poetry can give us the sensation that we're not alone in the world,' explains Victoria Field. 'It can feel like looking in a mirror and seeing our emotions reflected back.'

With a degree in psychology, Victoria is a poetry therapist who uses the written and spoken word for healing and personal growth. She leads poetry workshops with everyone from students

to adults with learning disabilities, and the elderly, reading and writing poems to help them dig a little deeper into their minds and understand their feelings.

'Poetry is a way of capturing life in a direct, concise and beautiful way,' she says. 'It's a means to connect, both with each other and bigger things, such as the natural world and love.'

In my workshops, we read a poem together and talk it through. There are no right or wrong answers; it's about exploring feelings and memories. Then, everyone will write something in response. People

describe feeling calm, having more clarity and self-confidence, as well as enjoying being creative.'

RECOMMENDATIONS

Chatting about her favourite poets, Victoria recommends American Mary Oliver for her work inspired by nature, and Charles Causley, a Cornish poet known for his ballads about people. Victoria also likes the contemporary work of Penelope Shuttle and Louise Glück, the 2020 winner of the Nobel Prize in literature, who writes about the universal themes of love, loss, grief and ageing. One final poet Victoria highlights is Jane Hirshfield, who combines daily observations with a deeper philosophical insight.

'During lockdown, the popularity of poetry soared'

# JOY OF poetry



Writing poems can help us in difficult times. We asked writer Victoria Field why it's the new trend of 2021



HOW YOU CAN BE A POET

Victoria Field gives her tips for getting started.

- ✓ **IMMERSE YOURSELF** To write poetry, you first need to read it. I recommend the *Staying Alive* anthology from Bloodaxe Books, *The Poetry Pharmacy* by William Sieghart, or *The Emergency Poet* by Deborah Alma. You can also just try Googling 'poem a day'.
- ✓ **FIND AN OPENING LINE** Once you've read a poem that really speaks to you, take a line from that and use it as a springboard for your own work. It's a good way to

combat writers' block because it helps you get started.

- ✓ **USE A TIMER** Six to 10 minutes is a good timeframe, and stops you sitting there worrying. Simply allow the words to pour out on to the page.
- ✓ **EXPERIMENT** Poetic form should be like a hammock, not a strait jacket – comfortable and liberating rather than imprisoning. Remember, not all poems have to rhyme. ➔

IN MY CASE

**'Poetry helped me heal'**



**CAROL BREWER, 58, from Belper, Derbyshire** says:

'For years, I've written poems for my family and friends, but it was

a fun hobby, something that allowed me to take time out from my job with Derbyshire Constabulary; I never imagined that it would become so important to me.

My symptoms began in 2013, with headaches and a tingle down my left side. My GP thought

it was a trapped nerve in my neck, but it became much more serious when I couldn't move my hand to use cutlery.

I was eventually diagnosed with atherosclerosis, a hardening of the arteries, which caused a mini-stroke. The next three years were gruelling, involving intensive doses of steroids, chemotherapy and various operations, including brain surgery.

It was an emotionally challenging

time. In need of an outlet, I started writing a bulletin to update my friends and family. I included a poem, on anything from the boredom of being in a hospital bed to my search for hope. Dragging myself to my desk brought a sense of achievement and happiness on even the darkest days. What's more, seeing me writing brought comfort to my family.

**'Seeing me writing gave my family comfort'**

Poetry has remained a big part of my life. During the first lockdown, I self-published

a poetry book, *Verses The Virus*. A donation from every sale goes to NHS Charities Together and Mental Health UK. I'm so thrilled to know that my poetry can now help others, too.'

*Verses The Virus (£5.99) is available at Amazon, Waterstones and pencilpoised.com*



**POEMS EXPLAINED**

Poetry has many varied forms:

- SONNET A poem of 14 lines, typically having 10 syllables per line.
- HAIKU A 17-syllable Japanese poem that consists of three lines. The first line has five syllables, the second seven, the third five.
- ACROSTIC A poem which the first letter of each line spells out a word, name, or phrase.
- BALLAD A poem telling a story.



*'Poems can offer solace and comfort... a good anthology is a joyride of feelings'*

Pam Ayres MBE

**SAY IT LOUD**

Remember reciting poetry in class when you were young? This can be beneficial in adulthood, too. 'Saying a poem out loud takes us back to childhood pleasure in language,' says Victoria Field. 'A poem can be felt in the body, too. If someone has been touched by the words, I'll often see them place their hand over their heart.' And while it may feel silly to begin with, reading out loud can bring mindfulness benefits, she adds. 'It slows everything down. We have all this stuff going on in our heads, but when we're reading a poem, we can focus on a smaller world, which can help us connect. Read it in different tones of voice and see how it changes. As you speak, think about the memories the poem conjures up; who and what certain words bring to mind.'

**OVER TO YOU**

Fancy yourself as a budding poet? Here's your chance to be published in *Prima!* We'd love to read your short poems on any topic you choose. Email your entries (under 80 words) to [prima@hearst.co.uk](mailto:prima@hearst.co.uk) marking your email 'Poem'. If your poem is chosen, you will be notified by email and appear in a future issue. Good luck!



Words Eila Dove Photography Renald Mackechnie, Getty, Rex Shutterstock, Alamy. \*According to The Forward Arts Foundation, the charity that arranges the UK's annual National Poetry Day. \*\* BBC 2009 ([bbc.co.uk/poetryseason/vote\\_results](http://bbc.co.uk/poetryseason/vote_results))