

# poems on my mind



**a toolkit for poetry writing by people  
living with neurological illness**

***by Georgi Gill***

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## What is this toolkit?

**‘Poems on My Mind’ is a set of resources for organisations wishing to run poetry writing groups for people with neurological conditions.**

The materials in this toolkit were created as part of a doctoral research project where they were used by a number of people living with multiple sclerosis (MS). Those participants said that they ‘really enjoyed’ and ‘loved’ the poetry sessions which they described as ‘absolutely brilliant’, ‘thought-provoking’ and ‘really relaxing’.

The toolkit is part of the Poems on my Mind project which is funded by the Institute of Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Edinburgh. The project was devised and is being delivered by Dr Georgi Gill.

## Why poetry?

Poems have been used throughout history as a way of expressing our deepest emotions and marking life’s significant events. Even people who generally have no interest in poetry include a poem or two in a wedding or funeral service. Interestingly, this custom is borne out by neurological research which shows that reading poetry helps the reader to access deep emotions in a safe way, because it triggers the brain’s primary reward centres. In other words, we can feel a range of strong emotions when reading poetry but still find the experience pleasurable.<sup>1</sup> Reading prose was not found to have the same neurological effects.

Similarly, the research leading to this toolkit found that writing poetry allows us to safely explore subjects that may make us sad or angry. Research participants found writing poetry to be a creative activity which boosted their self-esteem and sense of wellbeing. The sessions were, as one participant said, ‘an affirmation that you’re capable, that...your brain does work’. The interactive nature of the groups encouraged people to engage socially, reinforcing their wider identities and helping them, as one participant said, to ‘find that bit of [us] that’s still [us] without the MS on top.’ We also found other significant social benefits; the poetry groups enhanced emotional recognition and empathy among participants.

<sup>1</sup> Wassiliwizky, E., Koelsch, S., Wagner, V., Jacobsen, T. and Menninghaus, W. (2017), ‘The emotional power of poetry: neural circuitry, psychophysiology and compositional principles’, *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 12 8, 1229–1240.

On a practical level, poems can be very short. They don't require a plot like a story or autobiography does. A poem can be a snapshot, complete and perfect in its focus on one moment or image. This brevity of poems may suit people whose energy is constricted by illness.

Also, a poem does not need to make sense. As someone who came to poetry while trying to make sense of her MS diagnosis, I didn't understand what was happening to my body or why my identity felt so threatened. In poems, I didn't have to find an explanation or make a logical argument. Rather I could write as a way to explore what was happening and how I felt.

*Poems on my Mind* is not about writing professional standard poetry or becoming an expert. The following sessions feature prompt poems which are intended to open up conversations and reflections about individual experience of illness. They are *not* lessons in how to write the perfect sonnet. Partly for this reason, the prompt poems all take the form of free verse. This means that they do not have complicated rules about meter or rhyme scheme.

## Read, read, read!

If you are new to poetry, or feeling out of your depth, don't panic. Whether group member or group facilitator, reading poetry can enhance your confidence and benefit your own writing. Reading one short poem a day (or a week!) will give you fresh insights into what poetry can be. See the list of links on page 8 for poetry which is freely available online.

## How to use this toolkit

### Here are some practical considerations and tips to bear in mind when preparing your poetry writing sessions.

These resources can be used for online or in-person delivery.

The sessions are organised into the following stages:

#### **A Good Beginning**

A chance for everyone to chat and relax into the session and each other's company. The social elements here and in **A Good Ending** are important. Being comfortable with one another promotes a greater sense of connection, making it easier for group members to feel confident about sharing health experiences during discussion and writing activities.

#### **Reading and Discussing**

A safe way to engage with the week's theme, while exploring responses to the prompt poem.

#### **Sparking Ideas**

Activities to help us think of our own ideas for writing, inspired by the prompt poem and its discussion.

#### **Break**

A chance to rest and regain energy (and maybe a cup of tea). It can be switched to a different point of the session if required.

#### **Preparing to Write**

Mining the ideas that have been sparked as we begin to think about writing poems.

#### **Writing**

Drafting our own poems. There is no need to feel nervous here – the 'tricky' business of having ideas has already been done in earlier stages!

#### **A Good Ending**

This is an important chance to reflect, chat and share as a group, to check in on how everyone is feeling and look forward to the next session.

## Tips for working with groups

**These session plans have been designed for use with people living with MS, Parkinson's, MND or the ongoing impact of stroke. They offer space for conversations and writing about the lived experience of illness.**

As a group facilitator you are creating fun, safe spaces where group members can experiment with expressing their illness experience through poetry. Some people may want to set up group agreements with basic guidelines about how to make one another feel safe. Your organisation may already have protocols for conducting respectful group sessions. Please be mindful of these when leading *Poems on my Mind* sessions.

Your role is not to be a teacher or a poetry expert. (If you do bring those skills, that's great, but don't let the sessions become lessons.) Your aim is to be a peer-facilitator, exploring and discovering the poems alongside the rest of the group. While you may need to spend some time supporting members of your group, it is really good practice to write alongside everybody else if you can. This fosters a sense of community and shared endeavour.

Each session includes a 'prompt poem'. These poems align with the overall theme of the session and should spark conversations. Poetry offers space for ambiguity and multiple interpretations or opinions. Hopefully group members will be able to enhance each other's – and your own – understanding of the given poems with their own perspectives. Broadly speaking, there are no wrong readings of the poems, so as facilitator, don't feel pressure that you need to know the right one!

Conversations about prompt poems may flow spontaneously. However, in this toolkit there are suggested questions to get discussions going. It can be very helpful to start with broad, open questions. One or more of the following may be helpful in any workshop to kickstart a conversation:

**What struck you about this poem?**

**What do you think is going on in this poem?**

**Does anything in this poem confuse you?**

**What questions would you ask the poet?**

**Do you like the poem? Why? Why not?**

## Emotions

It can be cathartic, bonding or a relief to give others an insight into lived experience of illness. Yet discussing and writing about our health experiences may occasionally be challenging and emotive. If need be, remind people that they can take a non-scheduled break, or have a 1:1 chat with you after the session. Your organisation may have access to counsellors or a telephone helpline. If it feels appropriate and helpful to do so, you could refer individual group members to these support services or suggest they contact their GP. Try to end the session on a light note so that people feel positive about their achievements and are looking forward to the next session. A positive comment about members' poems always goes down well!

## A sense of an ending

It is important also to be mindful of the potential impact of end of the project. The last session is purposely designed so that people can continue to explore their experiences of illness, or if they feel ready to do so, move on to other themes. Time is planned into the session so that the group can plan any next steps they want to take. Some group members may be very keen to take their poems further while others might not wish their poems to be shared more widely. Always let decisions about next steps be group-led. Everyone's wishes should be respected.

Next steps may include some or any of the following:

**Celebration or sharing session in which the group meet again and read favourite poems that they have written.**

**A group zine or website to host the poems.**

**Continuing the group with more poetry writing sessions. For these you may wish to expand the subjects to non-health related themes.**

## Timings

The timings in the session plans are suggested. Feel empowered to do what works for your group. You might include more breaks or cover the activities of a single 'session' over two or more group meetings. If you decide to spread one session plan over multiple group meetings, then recap at the beginning of the subsequent sessions i.e. briefly reread the prompt poem for the group as a reminder, or ask group members to reread their freewrites before writing their poems.



## Accessibility requirements

These will vary across members of each group. Some participants may require support with using computers if the session is online. Others may face challenges with the physical act of writing or typing and may need the aid of a scribe in either online or face-to-face sessions. If scribes are unavailable, some participants may wish to write by making voice recordings on their phone or using dictation devices. These methods can work just as well as handwriting or typing for poem composition.

The concept of rest-do may be useful when planning for the group and when individual members are deciding how and when to direct their energy. This concept encourages people with limited energy to consider in advance how long to spend **doing** an activity and how to punctuate doing with regular **rests**. Wendy Bryant's book *Rest-Do Days: how to live with fatigue and get things done* explains the practice more fully.

### Note:

Because this resource has been designed for organisations working with a range of neurological conditions, it includes purposely non-specific language such as 'neurological condition' and 'illness'. Please adapt the language as appropriate to suit the specific circumstances of your group.

## Using the toolkit alone

**This toolkit has been designed for use with groups. However it is adaptable and can be used by individuals who want to explore writing poetry by themselves.**

If health management or the general busyness of life make it difficult to complete a full session in one go, adapt it as suits you best. You may choose to return to the activities for one session over a number of days or weeks. Each time begin your mini-session by rereading what you did last time so that it is fresh in your mind before continuing.

Discussion activities may seem impossible if you are working by yourself, however you can still benefit from thinking about the questions suggested for each prompt poem. You may even think of new questions that reflect your response to the prompt poem. You can consider these questions in your mind or by writing down notes. Remember there are no wrong answers, just sparks for your creativity!

### Tip:

When freewriting, set a timer on your phone so you know how long to write for. Just keep writing until the alarm sounds and don't stop to judge or edit what you have written. See this activity as warm-up stretches for your brain before you move on to more focused writing.

## Useful links

**The following websites are treasure troves of freely available poems and can help individuals and groups to expand their poetry reading.**

<https://poets.org/poems>

Poets.org is the website of the Academy of American Poets. It hosts thousands of free poems.

**<https://poetryarchive.org/>**

The Poetry Archive has over 2000 freely accessible poems. You can read the text of poems and also listen to recordings of them.

**<https://poems.poetrysociety.org.uk/>**

The Poetry Society has a varied selection of poems available to read. Their main site <https://poetrysociety.org.uk/> also has information about poetry competitions and education resources.

**<https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/>**

The Scottish Poetry Library website has many poems that can be browsed online. The site also features a number of articles and podcasts.

**<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems>**

The Poetry Foundation website has many poems available for you to read or listen to. The website is also a good place for those interested in learning more about the technicalities of poetry.

**The following books may be of interest if you want to take your poetry explorations further.*****52: Write a poem a week. Start Now. Keep Going* by Jo Bell (Nine Arches Press, 2015)**

This book features a different prompt poem and activity designed to inspire the reader to write a poem a week. It may be helpful for people wishing to continue writing poetry after finishing *Poems on my Mind*.

***52 Ways to Look at a Poem* by Ruth Padel (Vintage, 2004)**

This may be a good one for people craving more poetry discussion after *Poems on my Mind*. Based on her long-running column for the *Independent on Sunday*, in this book Ruth Padel presents poems and then discusses them. An intelligent but not elitist book.

***Rest-Do Days: How to live with fatigue and get things done* by Wendy Bryant (Hammersmith Books, 2024)**

This book may be helpful for group facilitators or members who are negotiating writing with fatigue.



# workshop 1

## metaphors

## A good beginning

**10-15 minutes**

Hellos and introductions – invite group members to give any key information they'd like to share about themselves and what they're hoping to get out of the workshops.

Describe the shape of the session so people know what to expect and help them to manage their energy.

*We are going to:*

*Read a poem together and have a quick chat about it.*

*Do a couple of easy exercises to help us generate ideas for our own poems.*

*Take a break*

*Draft our own poems using notes and ideas from before the break.*

*Reflect on how the session has gone with an option to share poems / snippets from poems if group members would like to do so.*

## Reading and discussing

### 10-15 minutes

Introduce 'Grief' by Matthew Dickman. This poem has been chosen because the poet describes a subject that is abstract and complicated as if it were an animal that is recognisable to us all, making it both surprising and thought-provoking.

When grief comes to you as a purple gorilla  
you must count yourself lucky.  
You must offer her what's left  
of your dinner, the book you were trying to finish  
you must put aside  
and make her a place to sit at the foot of your bed,  
her eyes moving from the clock  
to the television and back again.  
I am not afraid. She has been here before  
and now I can recognize her gait  
as she approaches the house.  
Some nights, when I know she's coming,  
I unlock the door, lie down on my back,  
and count her steps  
from the street to the porch.  
Tonight she brings a pencil and a ream of paper,  
tells me to write down  
everyone I have ever known,  
and we separate them between the living and the dead  
so she can pick each name at random.  
I play her favorite Willie Nelson album  
because she misses Texas  
but I don't ask why.

**By Matthew Dickman**

**From 'Grief' in *All-American Poem*. (American Poetry Review/  
Copper Canyon Press, 2008).**

## **Invite thoughts, questions, responses**

Possible prompt questions:

**Does anything surprise or confuse you in this poem? What? Why?**

**A purple gorilla might not be the first metaphor most people would think of for grief. Why might Matthew Dickman have chosen it for this poem?**

**Do you find any of the words or images striking or powerful in this poem? Which ones? Why?**

**Who is 'I', the voice of the poem? What can we work out about him or her?**

**What do you notice about the layout of the poem?**

**How does this poem make you feel? Do you like it? If so, why? If not, why not?**

## **Sparking ideas**

### **5 minutes**

Invite the group to take a couple of minutes to write down 3 things which could be a metaphor for their illness. They could be animal, natural, mechanical – anything at all which resonates. (The first time I did this exercise, I thought of my own MS experience as potentially being: a sloth; a faulty washing machine; or an Amazon delivery.)

### **10 minutes**

Freewrite. Explain the concept of freewriting: just keep writing without stopping, crossing out, changing spellings or censoring yourself. A freewrite is completely private so tell people not to worry about sharing it. Ask participants to pick one of their three illness metaphors and write down whatever comes to mind. Set a timer for 5 minutes and write.

#### **Tip:**

If someone gets stuck, recommend that they write down *The [name of chosen object] is...* and write whatever comes to mind to complete the sentence and keep going.

## Take a break

**15 minutes**

## Preparing to write

**5 minutes**

Ask group members to reread their freewrite. *What strikes you as interesting or good in it? Which words or ideas catch your attention? Underline or highlight these parts.*

## Writing

**20 minutes**

Ask group members to use their freewrite to help them develop their own poems. Make sure Matthew Dickman's poem is available in case people want to find inspiration for the layout of their poem.

## A good ending

**10 minutes**

Reflection. Invite the members of the group to read either their poem or just a few lines if the poem is long or time is tight. If people do not want to share their poem, that is absolutely fine. Maybe those people could say a little about how the session has been for them.

## In between days

**OPTIONAL ACTIVITY:** Pick a time of day when you can carve out a quiet 30 minutes. Spend five minutes freewriting about whatever comes into your mind. (It could be the view from your window, the food in your fridge, how you feel about the day or week ahead.) Don't judge or censor your writing: just write. At the end of the five minutes, reread what you have written, pick out any interesting words or ideas. Can you use them to help you build a short poem? Give it a go.



# workshop 2

## living in our bodies

### A good beginning

#### 10 minutes

Hellos and catching up. *What have members of the group been up to since the last session? Reading or writing any poems?*

#### 3-5 minutes

Describe the shape of the session so people know what to expect and help them to balance their energies.

*We are focusing on bodies today. How do our neurological conditions impact us physically – what are the sensations of living in our bodies? We are going to:*

*Read a poem together and have a quick chat about it.*

*Do a guided exercise to generate ideas.*

*Freewrite.*

*Have a break.*

*Draft our own poems using notes and ideas from before the break.*

*Reflect on how the session has been with an option to share poems / snippets from poems if group members would like to do so.*

### Reading and discussing

#### 15 minutes

Introduce and then read ‘Migraine’ by Kitty Coles. This poem goes inside and also beyond the physical experience of migraine. The poet doesn’t describe a migraine as a doctor or medical website would but tries to make the reader understand as much as possible how a migraine *feels* for her.



## Migraine

The first warning: it begins  
with borders thinning. Light  
entering my pores, some substance  
leaving.

I am smudging beyond  
the boundaries of my body,  
encircling it,  
as ectoplasm, halo,  
lipstick slipping  
over the edge of the lip.

Submerged, I hear  
boomily, speak in tongues.  
There are acrid odours, unrecognizable.  
I tell my hands to move. I'm amazed to see  
them hopping, jerking,  
marionettes, wild bunnies.

The walls are water,  
swishing, falling, swaying.  
Lights hover,  
multitudinous spirits thrown from heaven,  
towers sprouting,  
ramparts shimmering,  
the looming battlements of god.

Then the pain,  
considerably less interesting.  
It is bashing, insistent.  
It swallows everything.  
Afterwards I am like a newborn.  
I forget words for days.  
I hold my breath, my head,  
fearfully, stationary,  
a balloon tugging its string,  
a saucer brimming.

**By Kitty Coles**

**From Alland, S., Khairani B. and Sluman, D. (Eds.), *Stairs and Whispers: D/deaf and Disabled Poets Write Back*. (Nine Arches, 2017).**

## **Invite thoughts, questions, responses**

Possible prompt questions:

**What features of this poem make it very different to a medical description of a migraine? What is the overall effect?**

**Does anything surprise you about the description of a migraine in this poem?**

**Look at the layout of the poem. How does the poet mark the stages of her migraine?**

**Kitty Coles uses lots of images in this poem that wouldn't seem to go together – from 'wild bunnies' to 'the looming battlements of god'. What effect does this mix and match approach have?**

**The poet says she is 'smudging beyond the boundaries of [her] body'. What might this mean? Can you relate to this idea in terms of your own illness experience?**

## **Sparking ideas**

### **10 minutes**

Guided reflection. Ask group members to close their eyes or lower their gaze. Explain that you will talk them through a quiet reflection in which they will focus on their own body and you will ask questions, not for them to answer aloud, but to focus their awareness of embodiment. The following text, read slowly and with pauses, may help you to lead the reflection:

*You might want to look towards your arms, legs or feet, or you may want to keep your eyes closed and just be aware. What does it feel like to be in your body right now? What can it feel like to be in your body at other times? Take a moment to feel your breath and any sensations that you notice. Now, thinking of your body and how it feels to live in it, as it, think of a neurological symptom that you experience. Maybe you are currently experiencing this symptom or maybe not. Where in your body do you feel this symptom? How does it feel? How might you describe the sensation? Tingling, pain, buzzing, numbness or maybe something else entirely. Is heat or cold associated with this feeling? Is there a colour that you would associate with this symptom? Sit quietly for a moment with the feelings or the memory of the feelings.*

### **5 minutes**

This guided freewrite builds on the reflection so, if possible, start it straight afterwards, however, if someone needs to take a break, that is always fine. Ask members of the group to write about their symptom(s) and what it is like to live in their body. Five minutes of uninterrupted writing, no correcting, no editing, no crossing out. Just write whatever comes to mind.

## Take a break

**15 minutes**

## Preparing to write

**5 minutes**

Ask group members to reread their freewrite. What strikes them as interesting or good in it? Which words or ideas catch their attention? Underline or highlight these parts.

## Writing

**20 minutes**

Ask group members to use their freewrite to help them develop their own poems. Make sure Kitty Coles's poem is available in case people want to find inspiration for the layout of their poem.

## A good ending

**10 minutes**

Reflection. Invite the members of the group to read either their poem or just a few lines if the poem is long or time is tight. If people do not want to share their poem, that is absolutely fine. Maybe those people could say a little about how the session has been for them.

## In between days

*OPTIONAL ACTIVITY:* Hannah Laycock is a Scottish artist living with a degenerative neurological condition, in her case multiple sclerosis. In the photography project 'Perceiving Identity', she explores the neurological concept of deficit from her own experiences of loss, uncertainty, fear and liberation. <https://hannahlaycock.com/projects/perceiving-identity/> Look at Hannah's photographs. Do any of them resonate with your own experience of neurological illness? Write a poem about the photograph. You may want to describe what you see, say how it makes you feel and write about your own experience of deficit or loss.

Always be gentle with yourself. If this activity brings up difficult or unwelcome emotions, you can always stop and take a rest, deciding if and when you want to come back to it.



# workshop 3

## living in the world

### A good beginning

#### 10 minutes

Hellos and catching up. *What have members of the group been up to since the last session? Reading or writing any poems?*

#### 3-5 minutes

Session description.

*We are going to:*

*Read and discuss a poem together.*

*List generating.*

*Freewrite.*

*Have a break.*

*Draft our own poems.*

*Reflections and optional sharing.*

Remind members of the group that if they need to take additional breaks, that is fine.

### Reading and discussing

#### 10-15 minutes

Introduce ‘What Can You See?’ by Holly Magill. *This poem takes the form of a conversation. It is very short but impactful. It is very different to the other poems we have read together.*

**‘What can you see?’**

The question could be practical,  
well-intentioned, but it pins  
me down completely.

My answer confuses her:  
‘What can you see?’

‘Er, normal, I guess...’  
I shrug: ‘Yeah, me too.’

**By Holly Magill**

From Alland, S., Khairani B. and Sluman, D. (Eds.), *Stairs and Whispers: D/deaf and Disabled Poets Write Back*. (Nine Arches, 2017).

**Invite thoughts, questions, responses**

Possible prompt questions:

**What is happening in this poem?**

**Who might be talking?**

**How do you think the voice of the poem feels about being questioned about her vision?**

**Can you relate to this poem? In what ways?**

**This poem is very short and written in very simple everyday language. Why do you think the poet chose to do that? What effect does it have for you?**

## **Sparking ideas**

### **5 minutes**

List making. When we talk about our experience of illness we may be seen by others as only being patients or static ill bodies, yet we each fulfil many different roles. We find ways to negotiate illness alongside these roles. Ask group members to take a couple of minutes to think about these different aspects of their life and make a brief list. For example, you may be a mother or a son, a partner, a friend, a grandparent, a teacher, an accountant, a cellist, a metal detectorist...

### **5 minutes**

Freewriting. Ask people to pick one of the roles that they identified in their list. *How does illness impact this role?* Ask them to think about their interactions with others, e.g. at parties, work, or in the local leisure centre. Freewrite about this for five minutes.

## **Take a break**

### **15 minutes**

## **Preparing to write**

### **5 minutes**

Ask group members to reread their freewrite. What strikes them as interesting or good in it? Which words or ideas catch their attention? Underline or highlight these parts.

## Writing

### 20 minutes

Ask group members to use their freewrite to help them develop their own poems. Make sure Holly Magill's poem is available in case people want to find inspiration for the layout of their poem.

## A good ending

### 10 minutes

Reflection. Invite the members of the group to read either their poem or just a few lines if the poem is long or time is tight. If people do not want to share their poem, that is absolutely fine. Maybe those people could say a little about how the session has been for them.

### In between days

*OPTIONAL ACTIVITY:* Think back to conversations that you have had. Maybe difficult ones (e.g. with a doctor, or getting in trouble for something you did as a child), or a happy conversation (romantic chat with a partner, or laughing over an anecdote with a good friend). Use that conversation as a prompt for a new poem. Don't worry if you can't remember the exact words spoken – use your creativity to fill in the gaps!



# workshop 4

## dreams

## A good beginning

### 10 minutes

Hellos and catching up. *What have members of the group been up to since the last session?* If this is your last writing session as a group, this is a good opportunity to talk about how to celebrate the achievements of the group. (See *Overview* for ideas about a celebration session or publication of the group poems.)

### 3-5 minutes

Session description. *As this is the final session of Poems on My Mind we will have the option to continue writing about our experience of illness. Some of you may feel that you have now explored that enough and want to write poems on other themes. It's entirely up to you which approach to take. So, with that in mind, today's directions will be a little freer, however we will still:*

*Read and discuss a poem together*

*Freewrite*

*Break*

*Draft our own poems*

*Reflections and optional sharing*

Remind members of the group that if they need to take additional breaks, that is fine.

## Reading and discussing

### 10-15 minutes

Introduce 'In close' by Kristiina Ehin. *This poem retells a dream from the perspective of the dreamer. It is both strangely surreal and normal in the way that dreams can be. There are different ways of approaching a poem like this; you may want to let it wash over you with its unusual images and events, or you may want to solve it like a puzzle, finding symbolism in the imagery. There is no one right way of interpreting this poem!*



**In close**

In a dream  
I saw a ticket booth  
at a bus stop where  
birds' feathers were sold instead of tickets  
and the seller was...  
an old man  
with the early spring sun in his eyes

and for you young lady...  
he said slowly  
and took from somewhere next to the door  
where there might have been  
a bin and a broom  
one more feather  
a white plume  
light and as tall  
as himself

I paid and went  
in dream's muddy buses  
no notion of waking  
no fear of inspection

**By Kristiina Ehin**

**From *1001 Winters*, translated by I. Lehtpere, (Bitter Oleander Press, 2013).**

## Invite thoughts, questions, responses

Possible prompt questions:

**How does the poet make 'In Close' dream-like?**

**What, if anything, might the white feather mean? Does it need to mean anything? Why or why not?**

**How does Kristiina Ehin use punctuation (full stops, commas, etc) in this poem? What effects does that have?**

**We often forget our dreams very quickly after waking but can retain the mood or atmosphere of the dream for some time. What atmosphere does this poem leave you with?**

**Dreams about travel are common. Do your dreams have recurring themes?**

## Sparking ideas

### 7 minutes

Freewrite. *Choose a theme related to this poem, maybe:*

*dreams (real or imaginary)*

*sleep or rest*

*insomnia*

*fatigue*

*Or you could focus on dreams in the sense of ambitions. What do you want to do? Have your previous goals changed? How? Why?*

Ask people to write for seven minutes without stopping. They can focus on one or more of these themes. Let your imagination go wild.

## Take a break

### 15 minutes

## Preparing to write

### 5 minutes

Ask group members to reread their freewrite. What strikes them as interesting or good in it? Which words or ideas catch their attention? Underline or highlight these parts.

## Writing

### 20 minutes

Ask group members to use their freewrite to help them develop their own poems. Make sure Kristiina Ehin's poem is available in case people want to find inspiration for the layout of their poem.

## A good ending

### 15-20 minutes

Reflection. Invite the members of the group to offer either their poem or just a few lines if the poem is long or time is tight. If people do not want to share their poem, that is absolutely fine. Maybe those people could say a little about how the session has been for them.

Some extra time has been allocated for this activity so that the group can discuss possible next steps, such as a celebration session, publishing their poems or continuing writing together.

### For another day

*OPTIONALACTIVITY:* Browse the Poetry Archive. <https://poetryarchive.org/> Read and listen to a few of the poems available there. How does listening to a poem enhance the experience of engaging with it? How does the poet use their voice and timing to bring the poem to life? Choose a favourite poem that you have written during the Poems on My Mind workshops. Practise reading it aloud. This may feel silly at first but can be very useful for giving you a sense of what is working well in the poem. If any of it doesn't sound quite right to your ear, you may wish to make some gentle edits. You can practise changing a few words or maybe the order of some words or lines.

Reading aloud is a great way to support the editing process and it is also really useful to practise reading if your group are planning to do a celebration sharing session of the work that you have written together.



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