

Joel McKerrow is a true leader in Australia's
performance poetry scene.

Luka Lesson- Australian Poetry Slam Champ.

Joel brings care and magic to everything he
works on. Our community of storytellers are
among some of the most creative people in
the world, and he displays a unique ability to
inspire and move them deeply.

Harris III — Curator of STORY.

Joel McKerrow is captivating...
an extraordinary blend of warm generosity,
deft poetry, powerful charisma and no ego.

Krista Monson — Cirque De Sole.

Joel McKerrow is not just some redhead...
he's some redhead who happens to be an
exceptional spoken word artist.
Fiercely political and humane...the fact that
he's a redhead is inconsequential.

He's a redhead.

Shane Koyczan — Canadian poet

Joel reminds us why unplugged MC bards are
as rock-n-rollin their art as any band.

Andrew William Smith.

A poet who can move an audience to hold
their breath, to hang on every word, or cause
tears to tumble... He engages and nourishes
both the young and old with his performances
helping them to discover their own voice.

Andrea Lewis — Somerset Storyfest Director

Joel McKerrow is one of Australia's most successful, internationally touring, performance poets. He is an award winning writer, speaker, educator and creativity specialist and has performed for hundreds of thousands of people throughout the world, including being the third ever Australian representative at the *Individual World Poetry Slam Championships* in the USA.

Based out of Melbourne Australia he is the director of *The School for Creative Development*, the Artist Ambassador for *TEARFUND Australia*, is on the teaching staff at *Melbourne Young Writers Studio* and is the host of *The Deep Place: On Creativity and Spirituality Podcast*. Joel has six previously published books as well as seven spoken word/music albums.



www.joelmckerrow.com

Copyright © 2023 by Joel McKerrow

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means - electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other - except for brief quotations in printed review, without prior permission of the publisher.

Author: McKerrow, Joel.

Publisher: Joel McKerrow

Title: Story Beats and Rhyme Drops

ISBN: 978-0-646-88110-2



A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia

Artwork: Joel McKerrow

Design: Joel McKerrow

Copy Editor: Margaret Borneman

Website: www.joelmckerrow.com

This one goes out
to the squashed down,
hiding themselves,
trying to fit in,
explosion of a kid,
who is realising
that they can never hide
the creative fire inside.

Get ready...
your time is coming.

Story Beats and Rhyme Drops

Poetry for Young Peeps Like You

By Joel McKerrow

A Little Note from Joel

I know. I know. You don't really like poetry. Or maybe you think you don't like poetry. Or maybe you didn't like poetry, but something is causing you to think again. Or maybe you actually love poetry. Whichever of these you might be. This book is for you.

Cause here's the thing — I think we all actually LOVE poetry. But, maybe not in the way we have thought or been taught it in the past. You see, when I was at school, I didn't like poetry at all. But that's because I wasn't shown what poetry could be. I thought it was all rules and counting syllables and old-school confusing writing and just, well, boring. But I did LOVE listening to music. Music stirred me. Music moved me. Music made me happy. Music sang to me when I was sad. Music is one of the coolest things we have in the world. Do you like music? Do you love it?

Well, if you do...then you already LOVE poetry. You see, whenever you come across lyrics in music, you are actually reading POETRY! The music you love is just poetry that is sung. It is filled with rhythm and rhyme and simile and metaphor. It is someone trying to take what is rumbling around inside...and trying to get it out into the world. They sit there with a pen and paper and a guitar and they figure out the best way their words will sound.

Guess what...this is exactly what I do too. And, it's what I am inviting you into. Being a poet is

about taking the inner life of you and working out how to bring that out into the world through rhythm and imagery and wordplay and story.

I think we humans have a balloon inside us. The STUFF of life happens and our inside balloon gets blown up bigger and bigger and bigger until it feels like it's going to pop. Poetry is the way we let some air out of the balloon by writing it all down, getting it out.

So here you have a book of my poetry. Now, the only way to read my poetry is to read it OUT LOUD. So read it to yourself. Even if that feels weird. It'll be SO much better if you do.

My hope is that this poetry will inspire your own. In fact, I have created space in this very book for you to start. A bunch of empty pages with poetry prompts to get you going. I dare you to do them. I double you. I triple dare you.

Here's the secret though...The secret to writing good poetry is...STOP TRYING TO WRITE GOOD POETRY! Be a BAD poet instead. If you can allow yourself to write BAD poetry, then you have something to work with. But if you just try to write GOOD poetry then you'll get stuck with a blank piece of paper. So write something bad. Don't think in your head about what to write. THINK ON THE PAGE. Let it flow. Good or bad. Doesn't matter. Write straight away, get anything down and then later do a second draft to make it better.

Are you ready? Let's get into some poetry.

Contents

Here Come the Poets	10
Introductions	12
Identity Poetry Prompt	14
Three of Me	16
A Yoyo of Emotion	17
A Sneaky Poem	18
Throwing Stones	19
Anecdotal Poetry Prompt	22
On Fences and Walls	24
Never Judge A...	26
Wordplay Poetry Prompt	28
Saturday Morning	30
Superheroes	31
A Poo Story	32
Story Poetry Prompt	36
The Inner Voice	38
Ugly Words	39
Imagery Poetry Prompt	42
Apollo 8	44
Humanity	47
Social Poetry Prompt	48
A Thousand Wild Horses	50
Under Swanston Street Bridge	52
Fireworks in the Sky	53
Lost Socks	54
Random Object Poetry Prompt	56
Parentals	58
An Appropriate Size	59
Can You Hear it?	60

Beat Poetry Prompt	62
A Unique Body	64
Weird Spelling	66
Grandma and Grandpa	67
Biography Poetry Prompt	70
Eating Cheese in Paris	72
So What if I Speak in Third Person	73
Apple Trees	74
Thinking Back	76
Girl on a Train	80
Man on a Train	81
Observing People Poetry Prompt	82
A True Silence	84
A Walk With My Baby Girl.	85
These Two Hands	86
Ordinary Heroes Poetry Prompt	88
The Circus	90
Australia	92
Education	94
Advance Australia...Where?	95
Parody Poety Prompt.	96
Notes on Entering the Large World	98

Ps. Look for the QR codes for little surprises along the way. They are some random extra poetic goodies to show you just what your poetry can become. Like this one...



Here Come the Poets

When life is *bleugh*
and the world is *meh*
and the soul is *ugh*
and the heart is *splueght*.
Here come the poets.

When school sucks
and friends let you down
and teachers don't get it
and parents are...freakish aliens
and you feel like a...weirdo.
Here come the poets.

When the world sucks,
because nobody is listening,
because the earth is dying,
because the bombs are falling
and you can't fix anything
and you don't even know where to begin.
Here come the poets.

When the pressure is rising
and your insides are aching
and your hope is melting
and the light is fading
and it's all jumbled up and confusing.
Here come the poets.

Ink and imagination.
Here come the poets.
Open eyed and curious.
Here come the poets.

Soaring come the poets.
Roaring come the poets.
Refusing to stay quiet or ignore it all.

The poets come...
dressed in metaphor,
dripping similes,
story beats
and rhyme drops.

Here come the poets,
those who are afraid...Yes...
but still bravely show up at the page
pens-poised,
mind-ready,
steady-hand
to collect the memories. The memories.
The syntax of emotion. The ocean inside us.
Deep-diving poets giving names
to the un-classified creatures
in the dark of the depths,
in the belly of the beast,
in the famine and the feast.

So bring on the poets
and bring on the beat
and bring on this way
we awake from our sleep.
Bring on the music
and bring on the dreamers
and bring on this way
we remember the reasons,
for living and crying and smiling and laughter.
For rain and pain with no happy-ever-after.
When catastrophe strikes,
and nothing feels right
and your sight is blurry,
everything is scary, then...
Bring on the poets, who teach us to see.
Bring on the poets,
and make one of them...me.

Introductions

Oh, wait, I forgot some introductions...
My name is Joel Michael McKerrow. Though,
in my life, I've been called many things.
Some names too small. Some names too tall.
Have you ever felt you have to live up to a
name you just can't quite reach? I have.

And now, now I am here sharing words,
with you staring at my...insides.

No...not my actual insides. Not my guts, my
spleen or last night's ice-cream. How gross do
you think I am? (*Please don't answer that*).

No, you are officially staring
at my...invisible insides.
No, no no...I am not a ghost.
This is not a spooky reveal of my spectral self.
But there are those parts of me
that you can't see.

Like...hope.

Like...shame.

Like all the truest parts of who I am.
Just like all the truest parts of who you are.
The invisible parts. The best parts.

My name is Joel Michael McKerrow.
Joel was a bible prophet,
Michael was an angel and
Mckerrow was a Scotsman.

So really (*say this with a Scottish accent*),
I'm some kind of
angelic Scotsman,

here to bring ya a message,
ya wee lads and lasses.
And what is my message ya ask me?
Well, listen up and you'll see...

My name is Joel Michael McKerrow.
Joel is a poet and he's gonna *PUNCH*
the next person in the face who says,
 "but he doesn't even know it."

Instead I am full of ideas, words and notions,
and I'm holding myself open, saying,
"Come read this,
 come trek this,
 come travel this."

Call me Joel and I shall call you by your name
 *(If I can remember what it is, I am
 awfully bad at remembering names).*

But what is most important
is that you remember it.
No, not my name. You remember YOUR name.
 Remember who you are.
 It may not seem like you can forget it,
 but sometimes,
 we can leave ourselves behind
 trying to be like everybody else.
We can forget who we are just trying
to fit-in with who we are not.

So remember your name. Especially when the
bullies and the haters and your self-doubt
tries to take it from you. Remember your
name. And I'll remember mine. Joel Michael
Mckerrow. It's nice to meet you.

Identity Poetry Prompt



Now it's time to for you to introduce yourself. Write down your name and your pseudonyms. Your alias's. Your 'AKA's'. These are the other names you might give yourself to describe yourself and your personality and your hopes and your fears. Do as many as you can. Write it all down. Think on the page. Make mistakes. Be messy. Don't edit in your head. Edit later. Here is how it might look—

*My name is Joel Michael McKerrow,
AKA big red furball with the big kind heart.
AKA the flame that burns, sometimes too hot.
AKA the one who fails but refuses the label.
AKA safe harbour.*

My name is _____

AKA...

AKA...

Three of Me



There's three of me. Seriously.
Crazy I know. How could there be.
And no, I am not split personality,
Cause actually I think there's three of you too.

There's the me that I want you to see.
There's the hidden me.
And finally, there's the me I know I could be.

So let me introduce you a little more.

The first me is shiny and bling.
He acts tough.
Or nice. Or funny. Or friendly.
Or whatever he has to be.
You'd like him. I've made sure of it.

The hidden me thinks you won't like him.
He is cracked and crumbly. Too much jagged.
Doesn't really fit in too well.
But I think he's just scared to be seen.
Thinks you'll reject his rough edges.
But you wouldn't, would you?

The final me, he's the best.
He's self-assured and resilient.
He doesn't need to blow his own trumpet.
But I kinda wish he did sometimes,
cause the other two are just so loud
and most of the time I can hardly hear him.
But when I do...
when I reach out
for who I could be,
he tells me,

'It is ok. You are ok.'

A Yoyo of Emotion

On Monday morning
 there is an explosion inside you,
an eruption of frustration, anger,
resistance and sorrow.

Yet tomorrow, the eruption is nothing but joy.
 An avalanche of giggles,
 hilarious delight
 and you can't stop laughing at highly
inappropriate moments.

Still the next day, it's Wednesday
 and all you feel is a quiet contentment.
 A warm breeze. A soft gaze.

The following days, it's Thursday and Friday
 and you've fallen straight back
 into the tornado twist,
 the hurricane that lifts, spins
 and drops you...hard.

Saturday though is bliss. It always is.
 You're full of chilled out goodness.

Until with Sunday comes the boredom
 and you can't shake it.
 Limbs get heavy. Body aches.
You might as well be walking through sludge,
 you trudge into the Monday again.

These weekly emotions, sometimes,
they make you feel like a yo yo,
so you must remind yourself once more...
It is you who holds the string.

A Sneaky Poem

This poem is sneaky.
Sneaky like a mouse is sneaky.
Sneaky like a moustache.
Sneaky like a rat is, even sneakier.
Moustaches look like
rats are chilling in hammocks
 hung from the nose hair
 of polite men.
I don't like polite men with nose-hair.
Unless you are one. I like you.

And I don't like rats in hammocks
or rats crawling in the roof at night.
Scratching at the ceiling.
Trying to imitate possums.
I told you rats are sneaky.
Possums sound like dying aliens
outside my window.

Have you ever been abducted by a dying
alien possum asking for your heart so it can
survive and you have to decide whether the
alien gets to live or yourself?
Has that ever happened?

Nah, hasn't happened to me either.
 But, I tell you, there is a sneaky mouse
 and a sneaky rat and a sneaky possum
 and a sneaky alien all living inside my
 head vying for attention. That's what it
 feels like someday anyway.

This poem is sneaky, cause you don't think it
makes sense, but I assure you...it does. Maybe.

Throwing Stones



My son throws stones
into the river this morning.

Like I throw hopes into the air
every other morning.

I call them prayers.
He calls them *splats*.
Cause the water goes *splat*.

I sometimes wonder
if my prayers do the same.

But the river holds the stones
and the air holds the hopes
and the sacred holds the prayers
and the sun beats down on us both,
causing morning mist to smoke
out of our noses.

My son is overjoyed at the sight.
He thinks I am on fire,

'Daddy fire. Daddy fire.'

He is cheering
and I am burning
and the mist is rising
and the river is flowing
and an aeroplane flies overhead.

I am slightly concerned
he is so overjoyed
at his daddy internally combusting,

but I choose to ignore this.
I know I have been burning
for a long time now and still
have managed to not be snuffed out.

A burning bush. My son is Moses.
I tell him that he shall set the people free.
He agrees.

Well, he contemplates for a moment
and then nods his head and says,
'Bird poo.'

Ok. I take this as agreement.
A confirmation of his mission in the world.
That he shall set the people free
from the bird poop of their lives.

For he shall be called Bird-Poop-Man
and the people shall worship him
for the way he cleans their skin
and their porches
and their statues,
like the statue of the stately man
at the State Library
that always has pigeon poop
dripping down his cheeks.

My son is throwing stones
at the ducks now.
You see he takes his mission very seriously.
He shall not just clean up bird poop,
he shall take on the source of the problem—
the ducks themselves.

I decide I had better stop him
before he actually hits one.

He does not understand.
He tells me he wants to set the people free.
I tell him, surely there is a less violent way to
do so.'

He agrees.
Well, he contemplates for a moment
and then says,

'Daddy...fart.'

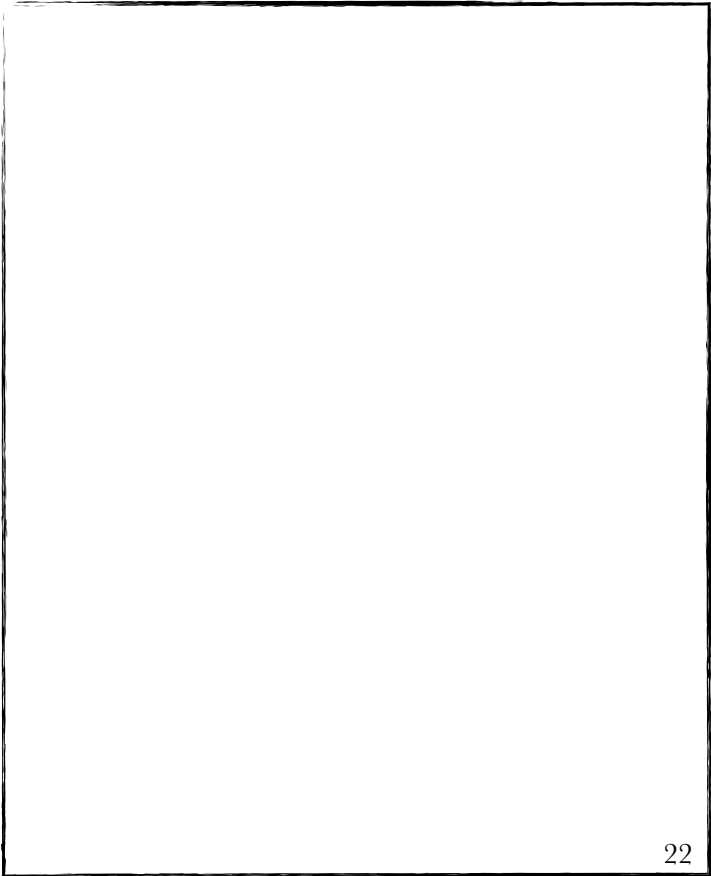
It is true. I did fart.
He is a smart child.
So smart he stops
 throwing stones at the ducks and
tries to make friends with them instead.

And I stand there, waft in the air,
thinking to myself,
 If only it were so easy
 with those we disagree with
 and start throwing stones at.
If only it were so easy when we
misunderstand our mission in the world.

I wish we would all realise its not nice to
throw stones at ducks, just like
it's not nice to throw stones at people.
I wish I could fart and you
would think this is funny
and forget all about the throwing of stones.
I wish we'd all just try to make friends
with the ducks instead, make friends
with each other instead.
Sticks and stones and broken bones,
 but what if ducks
 are just waiting
 to have a nice chat.

Anecdotal Poetry Prompt

You've just read a funny little story about throwing stones in the river with my son. Now, go back to a childhood memory of your own. Just one that stands out to you for some reason, you may not even know why. Start from an **INSIGNIFICANT** concrete detail you remember about that memory and then focus not so much on trying to describe the plot of what happened, but rather, on inviting people into that experience....

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the student to write their anecdotal poem. The box occupies most of the lower half of the page.

On Fences and Walls

The first fence I ever hated was...
the electric fence that I peed on as a child.
It was not a fun day.

After all, there are only two types of people
in this world. Those who learn from the others
who have gone before them,
 and those who just have to go
 and pee on the fence themselves.
I was always the latter.
And since then, I've never liked fences.

The second fence that I came to hate was
during my teenage years.
It was the corrugated iron variety standing
tall behind my hotel in *Vanuatu*.
The peek of a boy face over the top,
I wondered who he was,
walked from hotel room,
 passed swimming pool,
 across lush green grass and
 stood on tip toes to see...
 the boy and his sister,
knee-high in rubbish and the scrimmage
of desperation. I lent on the fence,
where lush green grass abruptly stopped
and the dirt of an ugly city began.

The grass is never greener on the other side,
when WE keep the water to ourselves.

I've never liked fences.
Those things that divide us, separate us,
 stacked between us.

Fences built high to keep *THEM* out,
to hold *US* in.
But holding, is not really the right word.
Fences do not hold us, they scare us...
into rigidity, into security, into a small space.

I have stood on the *Palestinian* side of the
border and placed hands upon the mortar.

I have walked in *Berlin*, the wall that was torn
down, twenty five years the separation of
mother from daughter from child from son.

I have knelt in *Dachau* prison camp,
hands torn by the barbed wire of genocide.

I have looked up at the *Belfast* Peace wall.
I do not know why, we would ever call it, a
peace wall. No wall has ever been.

Fences held up by both sides...
The left Vs the right.
White Vs black.
Men Vs women.
Christian Vs atheist.
Pro-vax Vs anti-Vax.



You name it and we fight about it.
Our voices rise till we cannot hear the cries of
those forgotten in the middle of it all.

They say, that it is not good to sit on the
fence and yet I am wondering if
if this is exactly where we should be.
Not twiddling thumbs and no opinion,
but with bandages for the broken,
with chisel and hammer in hand,
to swing, to swing until the wall is torn down.

Never Judge A...

At the back of the class
where the cool kids sit,
this fool did slip
into a chair, I definitely did not belong in.
My name NOT written all over it.
I'd bitten a sonnet or a poem or three,
there was no way for me
to fit in with a bunch of
backseat rabble rousers.

I'd dabble with flowers
before making any trouble.
A bubble around me.
Safety was the home I grew up in.
Threw up in. Swept up into
this one way of being.

It was there I'd gotten a picture
of these type of people in my mind.
Whilst I slept in the night,
they'd be out making fights.
So try as I might,
my sight was blinded by a stereotype,
A fairly over-sighted, assumption,
until this introduction by HIM
to his culture. A people that were not my own.

This was about the time
that he grabbed my phone.
This HUGE kid with a mop of hair.
I thought I'd never see it again,
But he was just giving me his number
so I could ring him again.
He was a stranger just looking for a friend.

His nicety pushing hard
against my prejudice,
He was generous,
togetherness was his passion.
An effortless ration of kind words,
 slashing at my blinders,
 hashing at my righteous bias,
 this lifeless rightness.
That I was better and brighter
than him just cause
of a fake politeness.
 In the likeness of me,
 in the whiteness of me,
 in the liberty I so freely enjoy.
Whilst he was judged by so many,
me included, deluded bigotry,
How wrong I was about him.
How wrong I have been
about so many other,
supposed enemies
now lifelong brothers.



Never judge a book
by the covers that others
slip onto those who are different to them.

Start again. Start afresh.
They may dress and speak differently to you.
But who are you to think any less,
or that God might bless
one type of people and not another.
So go sit with a brother, or sister,
who looks nothing like you.
Let them teach you.
Let them reach through
and take your hand.
Who knows where it might lead.

Wordplay Poetry Prompt

The poem above uses what we call *internal rhyme structure*. It's shaped around the sound of rhyming vowels. This is what we call *Assonance*. It is what we think of when we think about rhyming. But, these rhymes are not at the end of the lines. They are scattered throughout them. I would love you to write a piece about whatever you want, but focus on rhymes that are scattered throughout your lines. To push yourself further see if you can make some Multisyllabic Rhymes. That is, rhymes that match two or more syllables...like this line above—

*'...where the **cool** kids sit,
this **fool** did slip...'*

Saturday Morning

I crawl back
under the covers
and in this warm place, feel safe.

This doona
is my fortress.

These sheets
are my protection.

This blanket
is a castle.

This bed
my entire world.

This room
is the universe.

This lamp
is the sun.

These teddies
are my only friends.

I snuggle up here, away from the world.
I don't have to go out today.

So, under here, I am free.
Yes, this is the life for me.



Superheroes

So tell me, who is your favourite superhero?
What? I can't hear you. Say it louder.
Ah, I still can't hear you.

Ok. I'll just have to tell you mine.
My favourite is Clarke Kent.
Or maybe Bruce Wayne.
Peter Parker is close too.

No, no...not Superman, Batman or Spiderman.
I'm talking about their secret identities.
About who they are
beneath all the superhero stuff.

When they are their normal self.
A normal self, mind you,
that can be pretty jerky.
No, no...not beef jerky.
Jerky like the selfish ego of Tony Stark.
Or angry like a sullen X-men named Logan.
Or insecure like Clark Kent.
The self-doubt of Peter Parker.
The stubbornness of Steve Rogers.
The turmoil of Bruce Banner.
The recklessness of Hal Jordan.
The immature Billy Batson.
The arrogance of Doctor Strange.

Beneath the mask,
a superhero struggles
with the same stuff that I do.
Now that is what makes them heroes.
Not their powers. But their humanness.
They don't have it together.
Just like me.
Just like you.

A Poo Story

Jerome was busting.

And by busting I mean...BUSTING!!!

And by BUSTING!!! I mean...

a truckload of gorillas was jumping up and down on his bowels and Jerome was about to EXPLODE!!

And by EXPLODE!! I mean...

Ah, I'm sure you understand.

'Come on Mum!!! I REAAAALLLLLLLLY have to go,' he squealed as he squeezed tight his butt cheeks on the back car seat.

'You should have gone before we left.'

'But I didn't need to go then.'

'Well that's not my fault.'

'Jerry,' interrupted his sister Zoe, 'What did the bottom say to the toilet?'

'I don't know Zoe, what?'

'I love you so much, I just can't hold it in.'

'Ah...stop...that isn't helping.'

'Yes, Zoe,' their mother called from the front seat. 'Poo jokes are not my favourite.'

'Sorry mum,' said Zoe.

'But they are a solid number two!'

'HAHAHA...good one mum,' laughed Zoe.

'Would both of you...STOP IT!'

Finally his mother pulled into the driveway. Jerome was home. This was it. Faster than a flea speeding forward toward a flooding port-a-loo he bolted for the door. LOCKED.

'Come on!!' he yelled at his mother as he danced from one foot to the other.

'Making a poo-shake are you?' asked his sister as his mum unlocked the front door.
'Or maybe dancing the....'

Jerome didn't hear the rest, he ran as fast as he was able, through the entry, up the stairs, down the hall and into the....

'Hey, I'm in here,' came the yell from his dad inside the toilet.

'Nooooooooo!!!!!!!!!!'

'Just wait a bit buddy would you.'

'Dad....I can't....I can't HOLD ON!!!!'

'Well, you'll just have to, I only just sat.'

'Ughhhh!!!!!!!!'

Jerome was desperate now.

More than desperate. He looked around, for a bucket, or a pot plant, or a vase or a...there was nothing.

He gulped. He knew what he had to do...

There was only one other toilet in this old house.

Well, not quite IN the house.

He bolted back downstairs, still squeezing butt cheeks together

like a blockade

a barricade,

a rampart,

a vice-grip,

a bursting dam.

Somehow he was holding back the explosion.

Down he ran, straight past his mum,
 'I thought you needed to...'
 'I DO!!!!!!' he yelled as he turned the
corner and headed for the back door.

Zoe gasped when she saw where he was
heading. But he had to...he just had to...
Jerome reached the back door.
He stalled, only for the slightest moment.
He gathered his courage and pushed...
before him lay a dark spooky path
leading to the old outback loo.

Gulp

 If he was to be brave,
 it was now or never.
 There was no time to waste.
 No time at all.
 So from the door he bolted.
 A skeleton came at him
 from his right,
he ducked to his left.

A zombie on the left,
 he ducked to his right.

Straight through a ghost, he ran
as he span past the
 outstretched arms
 of a mummified
 ghoul.

By the drool of a red-eyed beast
he slipped, almost tripped, flipped
himself upright once more...
now so close to the dunny door.

But there was just one more obstacle...
A large troll was standing there,
right in front of the loo.

‘GET OUT OF MY WAY!!!!!!!!!’ screamed
Jerome, braver than he’d ever been before.
He hit the floor
and slid through the mud,
straight under the legs
of the surprised troll...
he kept on sliding... sliding...sliding...
right under the swinging door of the dunny.
Jerome disappeared.
A moment...one more...one more...and then....

UNSUITABLE VIEWING (or smelling)

The bomb exploded.
The dam released.
The cork was popped.
What sweet relief.
Jerome breathed deep,
which was definitely a mistake.

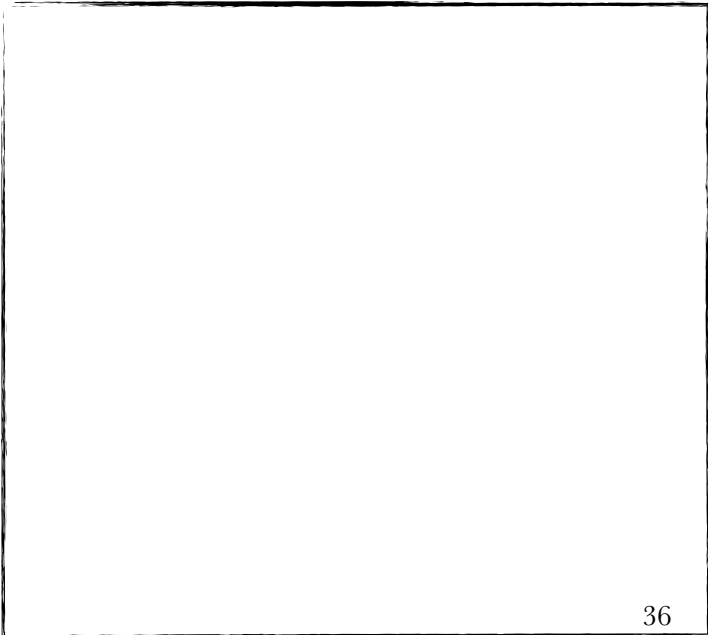
COUGH. UGH. SPLUTTER. COUGH. AGHH!!

And so the deed was done,
our hero had reached his goal.
And yet, still, all was not as it should be...
For Jerome realised he was staring straight
at the gap where the toilet roll should be but
was definitely...empty.

‘Oh Crap!’

Story Poetry Prompt

That was a bit of a crazy story. But, geez I love stories. I love mixing my poetry with my story-telling so people can't even tell whether its poetry or prose. How about you have a go at writing a fiction story poem. Think about a story as... A CHARACTER who WANTS SOMETHING and goes on a JOURNEY OF CONFLICT that CHANGES them. Jerome wanted to use the toilet, but he became brave in the journey he went on to get there. Start by WRITING DOWN (not just trying to think of a good one) THREE little ideas for a story. Don't overthink it. Then grab one of them, run with it and see if a story comes out. Use rhyming and alliteration and rhythm throughout to really tap into the poetry of it.



A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for the student to write their story poem ideas and final piece.

The Inner Voice

I looked out of my window this morning,
rain falling upon cold glass. Misty breath
and a whisper. I almost missed her,
the whisper. She speaks so softly.
My inside voice.

I am sure you've heard her too,
not my inside voice, but your own.
Or you could hear her, if you let yourself.

Like when the night is so dark,
or the morning so fresh,
or there's a restless tugging
 at the seams that hold you together.

Like when the weather is grey.

When the world is hazy.

When the school work's all blurry
 and you're not sure

 why you even have to do this.

When that person you just
 might, maybe want to kiss
 is walking out in front of you.

When everyone else
 seems to be walking out in front of you
 and you can't quite catch them up.

When you too are
 looking through a window,
 but it's all smudged and smeared
 and you're trying to clear it all away.

Stop. Listen. I promise she is speaking.
Can you hear her?
She is quiet, but still she is singing,
still she is always singing.

Ugly Words



Should is an ugly word.
And so is moist! And pus!
As well as crusty and festy and sputum.

So there is nothing more disgusting
than a pus-filled, moist, crusty explosion of a
pimple, just as you walk past someone, with
an open mouth and somehow, it goes into the
back of your throat. UGH!!!!!! Spew!!!!

Should though, it is worse than all of these.
As in,

I should be more like him
I should look more like her,
I should do this, I should do that,
I should have gotten over this by now.

Should is a chain gang word.
A ball and chain word.
A shackle around the ankle.

In the circus...when an elephant is young
it is pinned to the ground by
a small wooden peg.
It is held there,
chain around its leg
it pulls but cannot break free.
So it grows as a slave.

Tied down,
it walks around, it walks around,
it walks around in circles.

So that when the elephant is old
it can then be held in the same way.

One small wooden peg,
one chain around the leg,
is all that is needed to hold down a
10-foot tall, 5000 kilogram
mountain of an animal
that could tear a whole tree
from its roots.

Yet, it walks around, it walks around,
tied to the ground.

It is the worst kind of slave master
because it is a lie, a pretence.
This is what makes it all the more sinister.
You see, we believe
the string around our own ankles
to be made of unbreakable silver.
But, pull a little tighter and you will see,
that chain will break.

Yet, the adult elephant doesn't even bother.
And most of the time, nor do I.
I walk around, I walk around,
tied to the ground.

Should is an ugly word and so is...
'I'm hopeless. I can't do this.
I'm never good enough.
I'm never this enough.
I'm never that enough.'

These are ugly words.
Stuck at the back of your throat words.
They are toothpick words,
hammered into the ground
to keep you captive.
For don't we all have our circus masters.

And this is not an animal rights poem,
but perhaps it should be.
It's time to let the elephants free.
 I'm talking stampede.
 I'm talking rumble in the jungle.
 I'm talking dumbo ears.
Tell me you still have those ears
big enough to fly away.
Tell me that elephant legs
can still break bones when they need to.
Tell me they can find freedom in their stomp,
swinging trunks to a new sound.

No more circus music and balancing on a ball
too small for who you truly are.
Find the open fields. Find the elephant paths.
Learn to live again.
No longer tied to the ground
by their ugly words.
Cast off their ugly words.
Throw down their ugly words.

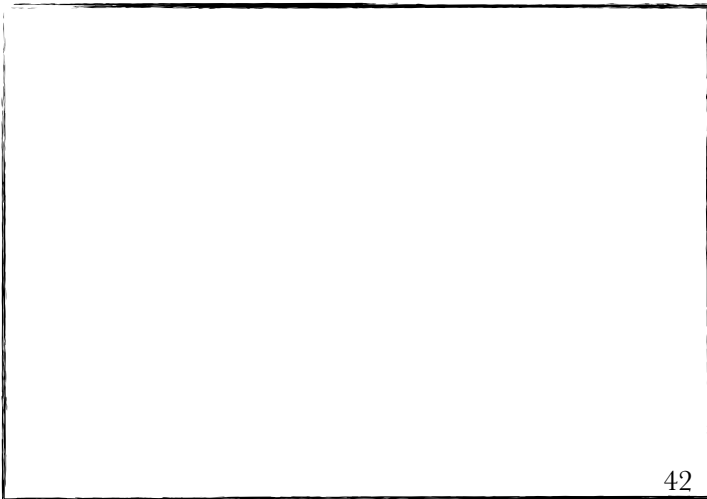
There is no doubt in my mind
why a group of elephants
are called a Parade.
You walk high. You, chin high. You, trunk high.
You tell the world
you will no longer listen to the ugly words
they throw at you.
Then you tell yourself,
that you will no longer listen to the ugly
words you throw at yourself.

You, stand up and declare...
 'I am ELEPHANT, and I will no longer
be a slave in your circus.'

Imagery Poetry Prompt

The poem above is one big long extended metaphor/simile. It began as...My life is like a circus elephant. But then I ran with it and explored the theme of *freedom* from lots of different angles. This is what I want you to do now. Every poem has some kind of theme/ message to it. BUT, the way we poets talk about that theme is by using imagery. Smashing together an idea with an image.

Your poem now is going to be about the major FEELING that's been rumbling around inside you recently (it could be joy, laziness, sadness, etc). BUT, what I want you to do is answer this question, instead of telling me about the theme. The question- *If your THEME was a LANDSCAPE (mountain, desert, city, alley, etc), what landscape would it be?* Run with an initial thought and extend it out to a whole poem... Do it FAST. Pen to paper. Think on the page. Don't stop writing. And...GO!!!



Apollo 8

In 1968 the Apollo eight spacecraft
took off from this place
that we all call home.

It was the first spacecraft
to leave behind
the earth's atmosphere
and orbit all the way
around the moon.

On the fourth orbit
the astronauts held a camera
up to the window
and took a picture of their home.
The earth. The photo was called, *Earth Rise*.

The earth that they could see
was the millions upon millions
of individual different species
all holding on
to a little, blue, bird
flying through an infinite black sky.

It was the 3.5 billion humans of that time.
It was red desert sands
and ocean blue
and whirling clouds
and raging thunderstorms
seen from above
like fireworks
exploding across the globe.

And it was oil slicks
and forests stripped bare

and cities out of focus
through the haze
of their pollution.

Those astronauts up there
remembered how down here
the day-blue sky would seem endless.
Yet, looking down from above,
the infinite blue was just
a paper thin halo of a bio-sphere
barely hugging the surface
of a small planet.

See what WAS infinite
was turning away from the earth
to see the great expanse
of nothing and everything
and realising in that moment
that the earth is so fragile
and so touchingly alone.
Just one tiny planet
amidst the unfathomable reality
of space and time.

The astronauts spent their entire lives
focussed always on what was above.
The earth and its problems were periphery.
Secondary. They had to be.
That is, until from up there
they looked back down here
and the earth came into focus
and who we are came into focus.

They realised that we
are not humans living ON the earth,
but we are OF the earth.
Like the apple is of the tree.

They realised, that if the earth dies
then we die with it.
We are not separate from it,
we are dependant on it.
Regardless of ethnicity or religion
or nations and borders.
We are quite literally all in this together.

We are one.

One with the 1% of rhinos left.
One with the 3% of tigers left.
One with the 10% of sea turtles left.
One with what is left
of our Great Barrier Reef.

So all the fighting
and the judging
and the wars
and all the politics
and the problems
that we have with one another.
All the ways we divide and conquer.
All the fear and animosity.
When the world is seen from up above,
these things do not matter.

You see, the astronauts left the earth,
but in return, they found what is most
important about her.

That all of her inhabitants
walk as one
toward the future.



Humanity



Brazilian,
Pakistani,
Australian
and Afghani.

Maltese,
Nepalese,
Portugese
and Sudanese.

Israeli,
Palestinian,
Italian
and Bolivian.

Dominican,
Estonian,
Moravian,
Hungarian.

Canadian,
Cambodian,
Korean
and Egyptian.

Chilean,
Armenian,
Romanian,
Tunisian.

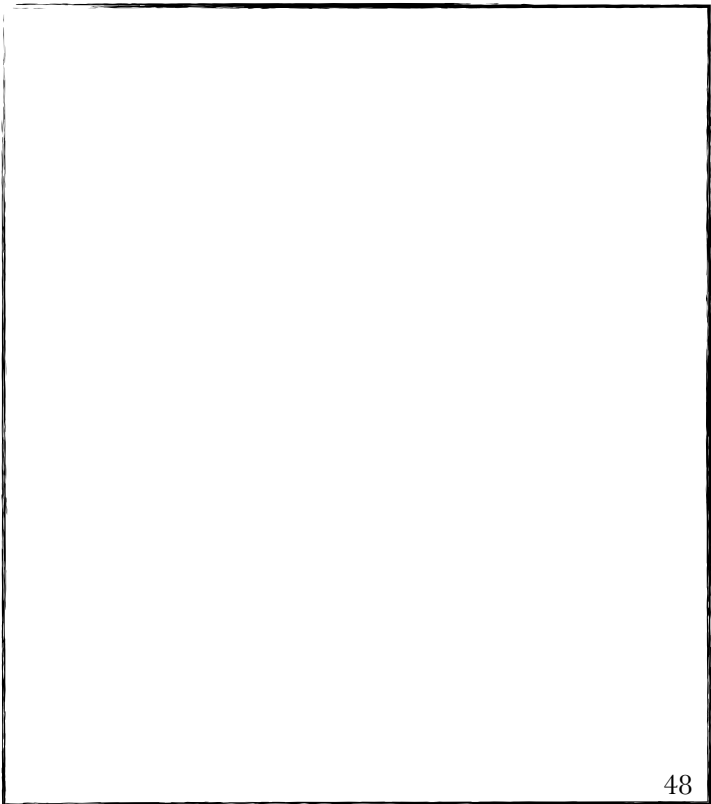
Burmese,
Taiwanese,
Japanese
and Lebanese

Scottish,
Polish,
Spanish
and...and...and...Finnish.

Before we are anything other,
we are first of all human.

Social Poetry Prompt

What makes you mad? When you look at our world, what do you want to see changed? What do you want to bring your voice to? The two poems above (and the QR code poems) are challenging the way we see ourselves. What do you want to challenge? It's time to write a poem about something in our society that matters to you. A persuasive poem. A poem to get people thinking. Poetry is a force of social change. So what do you want to say? Get writing...

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for writing a poem. The box is positioned below the text prompt and occupies most of the lower half of the page.

A Thousand Wild Horses

There is a horse that gallops inside.

There is a herd.

Sometimes the sound
of a thousand wild brumbies.

Sometimes it feels like freedom.

Sometimes overwhelming.

Sometimes hoping.

Sometimes stampede and we can feel
trampled down under the weight.

These wild horse feelings.

This growing up that can be so hard.

This movement.

 This walk.

 This trot.

 This canter.

 This gallop.

Tossed in every direction. A rodeo.

We hold on, try to find our footing.

Knowing that every wild brumby
can be bridled.

Every wild horse inside,
can be ridden well.

So we are learning
the names of these horses.

The ones inside. We quieten them down,
tell them not to run away.

We ask them their name.

They are too frightened to be tamed,
and yet if you hold out a hand,
and let them look you in the eye
and see the strength of your becoming.

Draw near to the wild beast
and whisper in its ear,

*'Don't be afraid.
I am here to stay.
I will learn to ride you this day.
I will learn to become
one with all that gallops inside.
I do not want to tame you into silence,
I want to see if we might
be able to ride together
you and I.'*

The horse and the rider
and the wind
and the mountain.

The way that fear
might just disappear,
when we learn to whisper its name,
take hold of its mane,
and just...ride.



Fireworks in the Sky

How can you sit still when life is so full,
when it's so brimming over
with promise and invitation.
Something new around the corner
and everything is the call to adventure.

To taste.

To feel.

To race, wind through hair.

This pace,

full lungs,

hoist the sails,

ride the waves,

fireworks in the sky.

You wonder, if you could bottle it all?

This moment.

These feelings.

Perhaps it would never end.

So you try to capture it,

knowing full well

that you never can.

Still, your pen marks the page,

words tumble onto the white

as the sight that felt like fire

is somehow transcribed onto the paper.

If this is you,

I wonder

if perhaps

you truly are...

a poet.



Lost Socks

Have you ever wondered
 where they all go?
 Those darn socks.
That daily frustration of
searching and searching
 only to find one...
 just ONE...
 ONLY ONE!!!
ARRGGHHH!!!!!!!
 (I'll calm down. Sorry).

It's a cold morning
and my toes are crying
cause of the nipping sting of the tiling.

How I wish for underfloor heating.
Instead I go searching
for that woollen pair of toe-warming gloves
(also known as socks).

Yet, from the drawer inevitably,
I pull ten single socks with no pair,
eventually throwing them
 frustrated into the air.
An explosion
 of cotton,
 wool
 and polyester.
 Yesterday I swore to myself
I would buy a new pair.
 But I didn't.
 I haven't in so long.

Putting off
the inevitable trip
to the shop.

The socks drop now
all around me.

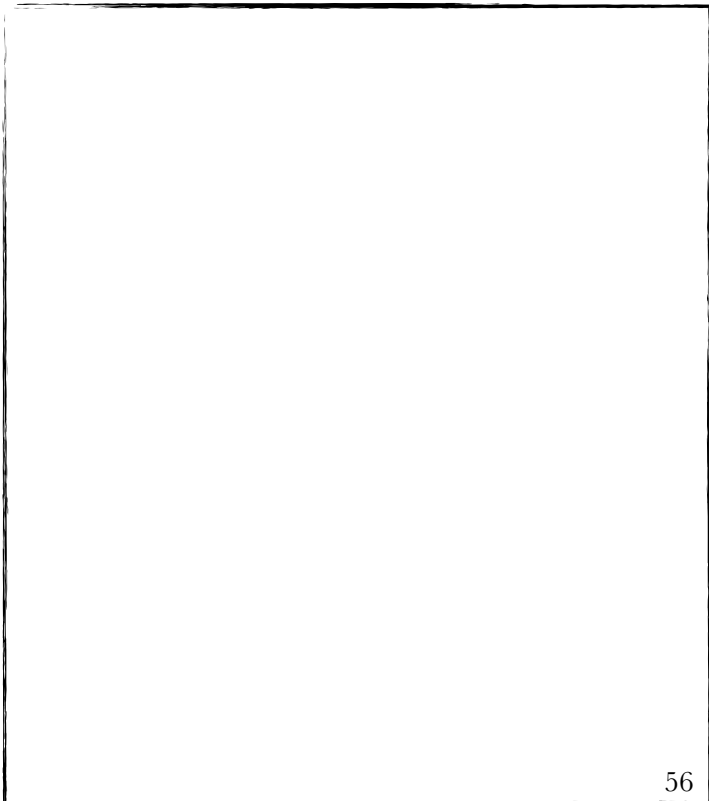
A pattern of lonely,
friendless,
stretch-less,
hopeless,
old single stitchings
of what once
was a beautiful couple,
now bereft of a partner.

The best socks I ever owned
and now they are but separated pairs.
The despair of lost lovers
forever destined
to walk the world
with no one to hold,
 no one to be folded up into,
 no one to whisper to
 in the darkness
 of the sock drawer.

Geez, I realise,
being a sock
is a lot harder
than just losing one.

Random Object Poetry Prompt

You just heard my poem about lost socks, so I wonder what is a random object you could write about? Look around your room. Choose an object. Observe its concrete details. Texture. Colour. Size. Etc. Have a conversation with the object. What does it want? What does it fear? Now, ask yourself, *what is this object saying to me about my life at the moment?* Don't just think about this...WRITE IT DOWN. See if a poem comes out of it...

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the student to write their poem. The box occupies most of the lower half of the page.

Parentals

Parentals can be so frustrating.
Trust me, I am one...I should know.

A slammed door in my face
and I am left remembering
when I did the same.

When my anger felt so justified
and I'd fly up the stairs,
stamp all the way to my room and
SLAM the door shut.

Have you ever done this?
I wonder if your parents stood there,
like I do now, remembering back
to their own righteous tantrum,
to their own slamming
of your grandparents door.

I wonder if your grandparents
thought back to their parents
and their parents thought back to theirs
who thought back to theirs.

Now I'm wondering what they slammed in
anger, before the invention of the door?

All this to say, next time you rage, just know...
you are in a long line of
feet-stampers and
door-slayers and
one day it might just be you,
standing there, door slammed in your face,
by a child who looks just like you.

An Appropriate Size

Have you ever felt small?
Like, too small for this world?
That feeling of not being seen.
You wanna scream,
 but nothing comes out of your mouth.
When what, only yesterday,
 felt an appropriate size
 is now giant in front of you.

The smallest snail that appears mammoth.
The small sadness that has turned mountain.
Your anger is an ocean. Your fear is the sky.

When you feel small, I beg of you....
 Stare down that mountain.
 Hold your ground,
 as feeble as it may seem.
For the truth is, you are not small.
And here-in lies the secret.
The secret that changes everything.
Feeling small, is just that...a feeling.
It is a fleeting shrinking.
Feelings are not truth.
They just show us what we think is true.

But what is true...
 what is true is that you are not small.
 You are Mountain. You are ocean.
You are wider and taller and greater
than any attempt to squash you down.
So stand there and stare down
the giant things and soon...
they shall take their appropriate size.

Can You Hear it?

(YOU MUST READ THIS OUT LOUD!!)

Boomsha

Boomsha

Boomsha

weh weh weh.

Boomsha

boomsha

Boom...sha.

Boom

Boomsha

boomsha

Boomsha

weh weh weh.

Boomsha

Boomsha

Boom...sha.

There's a beat in the sounds
of the rhythm in the night.
There's a sound of the beat
from the boom-box bright.

There's a rhythm in the world.
There's a beat within our body.
There's a beat within our body,
becoming a drumming,
becoming a drumming.

There's a drumming that is coming,
set the rhythm now a-strumming.

Like strings at the centre
were plucked by a mother
and vibrations of this earth
found their rhythm in its beat.



Sending waves through the air,
meeting each of us the same,
puts a beat in the brain
in your bosom once again.

Puts a beat. Puts a beat in your body.
Puts a beat. Puts a beat in your feet...

So, feel the beat and feel the rhythm.
This beat's gonna tweet
till it greets your feet
FOR...the music we been listening to,
the sounds we been hearing,
these tracks they been playing us,
these melodies been tricking us,
they taking us to spaces
where the only way to place
is to be like the rest of these, busy BEES.
Just keeping gears of society
oiled and spoiled and boiled, just right
for those of us playing
on the top decks tonight.

But if you listen close,
to the decks below,
to those disposed in cargoes,
You'll hear the beat...

 A louder tune than before.

 A better rhythm now,

 knocking at your door.

Can you hear it? Can you hear it?
There's a beat... so bang your drum.
There's a beat... so bang your drum.

Beat Poetry Prompt

If you didn't read the poem above out loud, then go back and do it again. The poem is ALL about the rhythm. The hip-hop writing form known as **RAP** literally stands for **R**hythm **A**nd **P**oetry. I'd love you to write a poem focussed solely on rhythm. You gonna have to SPEAK this out loud as you write it, or it wont work. Find the rhythm. Find the musicality of the poetry. You can look up instrumental hip hop beats on YouTube and have them playing in the background to help if you like.

A Unique Body

I remember the day
that I divorced from my body.
A cut and a separation.
I was fourteen and hairy
and she was fifteen and told me
that she would never date someone
with a hairy back. I crumbled. Stumbled.
Ran headfirst out of that room.
Headfirst. It is the right word.
My body did not follow.
I purposely left it behind.
Forgot that I had one.

Maybe you have done the same?

It was easier that way.
To wear t-shirts to the beach,
to not show myself to the world.
I knew that girls had body issues
 but I was never told
 that boys could have them too.
It is too harsh a world
 with too many a critic
 and too much to be insecure about.

I could not live up
to who they wanted me to be.
 I didn't fit inside that box.
 So I left it behind,
 my body that is, sadly not the box.
I carried the box with me.
The thing I felt I had to measure up to,
But never did fit inside of. How I wish now
I had thrown the box and kept the body.

Instead, I forgot that I had a body.
Like the many who have done the same.
Believed the shameful lies about what they
HAVE to look like.

 If this is you, I plead,
 don't forget,
 this body that is yours.
Fully and completely yours.

And I know you wish
 it looked more like this,
 or more like that.
The fact that your nose feels WAY too big.
Your ears stick out.
Your freckles even more so.
You don't measure up.
You don't look how you think you should.

But, you know what?
It took me many years
 to embrace my body as my own.
 To love me just for me.
 To smash that box
 on the rocks
 of my own self-love.
To see myself as unique.
To be OK in my own skin.
And I tell you,
it was the best thing,
I ever did do.
To learn how to love ALL the parts of myself.
So, don't forget, your body is yours.
Fully and completely yours.
You are one and the same.
To name this now...is a superpower,
that will make your life SO much easier.

Weird Spelling

Are you a little *bezerkily*?

I mean, surely that's a word.
Or at least it should be.
At least it rhymes with oddity
and sounds like eccentricity.

Are you a little *bamboozley*?

Confuddled by trying to be
just like them? Like I've been trying
to *squisheroo* down the part of me
that makes it *hardery* to see how I fit.
I've been trying to *fiterigrit*.
Why can't I fit? I just want to *fitergrit*.

Are you a little *Quirk-o-phagus*?

Into the sarcophagus
you throw all the quirky *weirdalicious*.
You kill all the *strangenesserness*
before they might notice.

Are you a little *Irregularphobic*?

Scared of *non-conformagarity*?
Of drawing too much interest
in the *bizarreylooniness*
of what makes you different?

I only ask because, I was too. I hid away the weird, like it was *bad spelling*. But then I realised, that the part of me that makes me *bezerkily* and all *bamboozley* is not just a part of me, it's the heart of me. Too much energy spent trying to be like everybody else. So instead I've let my weird become the wellspring and that water is *everythingering*.

Grandma and Grandpa



Betty Winifred King first opened her lungs in 1928. The daughter of Benjamin Alfred Bruce King. A farmer's child, out of breath, she would ride her horse every Sunday to Myrtle Creek Station, catch the train to school and let the pony find his own way home.

Two years before the birth of Betty, Neville Raymond McKerrow opened his lungs for the first time. He was the son of a blacksmith-cum-dairy farmer. The grandson of a Scotsman who rode waves built of promise. The exhale of the ocean to a new land Down-Under.

My grandfather would walk the cut dry skin of Australian soil collecting stones, the bones of the earth. I tie these stones around my neck.

My grandfather is a stone.
I tie my grandfather around my neck, close to my lungs. He listens to me breathe.

When depression struck Australian shores like the short breath sweat-wet blanket of humid skies, Betty Winifred King consistently insisted on inhaling the humidity. When her home and all that she possessed later burnt to the ground around her, she would exhale the smoke of memories lost in black ash. My grandmother is the breath of resurrection.

Neville Raymond was a fisherman, ocean lungs and salty lips. Betty King liked falling in the water so that Neville would have to rescue her. Fish never tasted so good.

In the ocean they found each other. My grandfather, my grandmother, pressed breath together. The inhale of her exhale, these lungful pauses. Betty was told her belly could bear no children. These lungful pauses.

How desperate the prayers of a barren womb. Surely God would take notice. And perhaps He did, when in 1949, my father, the eldest of three, from the belly of a barren woman, breathed his first. My grandmother is a miracle worker. My father is a miracle.

My grandfather was a banana farmer. In the year that Sue was born, God blew hard till a cyclone stripped bare banana trees and smashed the fruit to pieces.

Yet still, they persisted.

Hook, line and sinker, thrown once to the water as fun, now, the very food that fed the family.

My grandfather the fisherman.

My grandfather the sugarcane cutter.

My grandfather the bricky's labourer.

My grandfather the road worker.

My grandfather the construction ganger.

My grandfather, a hero.

He kept his family alive.

Betty and Neville built themselves a wooden rowboat, sailed the ocean together, fished the seas, ran the wind.

On the 18th of May 1985, I was two years of age. Neville and Betty were camped by a river on their way around the circumference of Australia. During the song of the night my grandfather's lungs contracted within his chest, held breath too long. He breathed his last. These lungful pauses.

I wish that I could talk with him. Inhale the smoke that rose from his pipe. Inscribe his history into my skin. Sinewed muscle wrapped around brittle bone. Feel his whisper on my cheek when I am lonely.

After his death, one year on, Betty McKerrow bought a campervan. She completed the trip that was left unfinished by the gravestone of my grandfather. My grandfather is ash, spread across the ocean. My grandmother is a survivor, weathered years spent staring at the sun.

On nights where I am lost inside myself, may I remember that I, too, am ash upon the ocean. I am fish and I am stone. I am sugarcane cutter. I am banana farmer. I am resurrection. I am barren woman who holds a baby. I am the inhale. I am the exhale of all that have gone before me. Within me, the histories peel back until their story is my own.

I draw sweet air through these lungs, deep and long, as pure as prayer.

These lungful pauses.

Biography Poetry Prompt

You've just been introduced to my own Grandparents. I would love you to write a poem about a family member, or friend or someone who is close to you. How would you describe them and their life? You might need to do a bit of research. You'd notice too there was a lot I could learn through the life of my Grandparents. What does your person have to teach and how would you bring that into the poem? Moving from their life to some bigger reflections about life. Get into it!

Eating Cheese in Paris

On a Parisian street
(a fancy way of saying we were in Paris)
we stared through the window,
mountains of mouldy cheese
stacked just so.

The owner came to the door,
handed us a slice
with a twinkle in his eye,
like Ollivander gives out wands.



We did not choose the cheese.
The cheese chose us.
Spoke of its honour to be eaten
by such fine Australians as these.

It gave itself to the task
with not a shrug of resistance.

Have you ever placed the most
gooey, tasty, oozing cheese imaginable
right on your tongue?

I tell you, the whole world slows down.
Nothing else exists.
It's just you and the cheese.
This is what it is to lose one's self
in Parisian streets and eat cheese.

God eats cheese.
There are so many things about God
that I am unsure of,
but this is one thing I believe to be true,
God eats cheese.

So What if I Speak in Third Person

Joel is a moment. Just a moment.

Joel is a thread drawing time together and space together into this one body. Joel is a stitch. Joel is a weaving. Those things that unravel, he threads them together.

Joel walked the rain yesterday. His son ran fast calling back for Joel to be proud. There is nothing else that Joel could be.

His baby daughter is a squish of flesh and fat rolls. The soft giggle of a face finding its lips. She is soaking in everything.

His son is a bullet and a hurricane. A bullet riding a hurricane. His son grows his ABC's with as guttural a voice as he can.

Joel is a Father and a husband. The two are very different things and yet he is only one thing. One body. So many personas.

Joel is a mask and an open door. He is hiding. He is standing on the stage. Joel is frightened. He is confidence.

Joel is confused. Two sides. One coin. Flicked into the air. Snatched from the air and placed in breast pocket close to heart beat.

Joel is heart beat. Joel is an inconsistent rhythm finding consistency somewhere in the pulse. The pulse. Joel is a beat. Joel is a moment. Just a moment.

Apple Trees

In a church on Loudon street,
opposite the Poosie Nansy Pub,
in the old town of Mauchline, Scotland,
lies the grave of my
great,
 great,
 great,
 great,
 great Grandfather.

John McKerrow.
Died 1813.

The headstone is barely readable.
What once was a life
etched into stone,
Is now eaten away
 by time
 and wind
 and rain
 and the way we forget
 and too much worry about the future.

Moss-covered patterns blanket the stone,
white stains and patches of mould.
I kneel on the ground
at the foot of the grave
with wet knees and a cold decay.
And the bold remains.
And the honour that is due.

He is quiet now.
He is silent now.
He was a preacher then.

Spoke on for so long
the congregation
had to remind him
of the late hours
and closing eyelids.

The apple does not fall too far
from the tree
 from the tree
 from the tree
 from the tree
 from the tree
 that is me.

Born 1982.
Joel McKerrow.

There are many apples these days, Grandpa.
Many apples from many trees.
It is okay.
You can be quiet now.



Thinking Back

I remember pram pushed days
under Pittsburgh skies
where Mum took these wide-eyes
and showed the world to me.

I remember all those times
we'd sit on dad's knee,
ride horsey till that pony
would surely buckle
under the weight of such moments.

I remember the stories
of heroes and hobbits,
of shepherds with slings,
of Narnian kings,
of princes and thieves.

These were the fables
that wrapped a sword in cloth
and laid it by my bed side
and I can't remember losing it,
but it's not there anymore.

I remember we'd roll down grass hills
and the stains on our knees
showed where we'd been,
with the green smeared on our clothes.
And we'd trek up the creek,
that to us was a river of adventure
and the beasts we'd find there
and the tribes would chase us
and the treasure chests buried
in the caves beneath the waterfall.
Then we'd ignore the screams of our mothers
as they'd call us back home.

I remember we two ran circles
around the slide that your brother fell down
and the mud between our toes
and the clay in our hands
and the cubby house
that was our castle.

And I was a hero
and you were a warrior
with a slingshot in your hand
and firecrackers in your pockets.

We'd fly through the sky
from rope swing vines
and the scratches
from the blackberry bushes
only proved how strong we were.

I remember we'd swim the ocean
in your backyard pool
as the sharks would chase us
and Marco would find Polo
until our eyes were chlorine red
and the far off call of dinner.
And how many sunsets have I seen since?

How many times has *Pinky and the Brain*
taken over this world?
Still I cant find my way back anymore.
So who you gonna call?
"Ghost busters"
or maybe that girl
you always had a crush on.
The one from *Saved by the Bell*,
or the cute one from *Degrassi Junior High*
(the original series of course).

I ask you... Have you ever, ever felt like this as
strange things happen, when you're going
round the twist?

But this is not the story all about how my life
got flipped, turned upside down. And I'd like
to take a minute just sit right there, I'll tell you
how I became the *Fresh Prince...of Australia*.
No this is not that story. This is my story.

I remember how we'd ride bikes all night
through the streets, steal sweets
from the corner store.
The cricket bat and footy ball
and kiss-chasey with the ladies
from Lindsay Park Public school.
When a kiss on the cheek
was the explosion of a world.

And no one could ever stop us,
no trolls would ever squash us.
We'd sink our teeth into life
or better still into
chocolate coated doughnuts.

We'd ride waves as they'd peak above us,
the girls on the beach we'd hope would see us
as we'd hit the lip of a surf
that was six foot tall
bragging that even these were small.

And the eucalypt leaves
became rollies in our hands
and we'd cough, splutter, choke on...
just how cool we thought we were.

And you'd dared me to tell her
that I thought she was cute,
but red-hair with freckles
never got me past first base,
or to hit a ball at all.
I'd be stuck swinging strikes.
But that was alright,
cause my mates told me
that I was too nice
to be left behind the school canteen.

I remember there was Richie
and there was Sam
and there was Wayne
and there was Kane
and little Nik Nik Mihajlovic.



We'd dream and we'd run
and we'd stumble and we'd fall...
head over heels for any girl
who paid us attention at all.

And now those days are all gone
and the new has begun
and it seems I have a son
and a daughter of my own.
And I'm just trying to build my own home.

No, not an actual house,
in the current economic reality
that is just not a possibility.

I'm trying to build a home, one filled with
memory and trust and love and listening.
One in which my children could look back and
say with a smile, 'I remember....'

Girl on a Train

She was caught in a web. I wanted to brush the cobwebs away. But stroking a strangers

forehead on the train is generally an unacceptable form of social interaction.

There was a movie soundtrack playing around her head. I could hear glimpses. Her life was a

screenplay. Head knelt against the glass. Eye lashes moving in slow motion. Jet black hair

that looks like it is normally combed to perfection, plastered to face. Today it is

unkempt. A birds nest. She doesn't seem to notice. I catch her eye for a moment. She

looks surprised to see me. I turn quickly. Another social rule on the train. I find faces

fascinating. Her face is gaunt. Too stretched. All worry and concern tied tight around her

jawline. I imagine the way she stretches out her mouth at the end of the day trying to

soften the lines but they never do disappear. A tunnel and the world outside is black and

the window has become a one way mirror and I realise that she has been staring at me

and I wonder what character she casts me as in the writing in her mind.

Man on a Train

His business suit gives away his profession
but not his calling, not his burning, not what

the little one inside desires. His beard is a
shift and a hollow. Where brown has become

grey. These years are waning on and on
through the starch light of history. His beard

gives it all away. Tells me that five fingers
grip his spine and twist it backward and he

cannot feel this, but his face knows it. He
wears fluoro-green socks with a splash of red.

Beneath the cuff of his suit I see them. His
rebellion against the system, against the

office, against the ageing. The history of a
man who never spread his wings and couldn't

see the ocean through the window. But I
wonder how many times it called him.

I wonder how many times he stood at the
edge and felt the surge around bare ankles,

green and red socks tossed wild onto the
beach behind him. To stare at the horizon

like he's about to dive in. He's about to dive
in. But I do not see whether he does. Or

whether he turns weary shoulder away and
walks back to his office to start another day.

Observing People Poetry Prompt

Don't pretend that you don't do it...look at people on public transport. think about who they are, make stories up about them in your head. Well, if you don't...you should. The people I observe become the characters of my stories. Which is what I want you to do now. Just like I did in the two poems above. Jump on a train or bus and sit there and write a poem about the person sitting opposite you. What stands out to you about them? Use your imagination to write down who they are.

A True Silence

I am walking at a pace,
I always walk at a pace. Too fast.

Too many steps in too short a time.
My mind is a litany of the things
I have not been brave about.

Fists jammed into my pockets.
Knuckle white. I am trying to find
my way out of this town.

All I can hear is the sound of silence
on this quiet street.
It should bring the peace I am seeking,
but suburban silence is never silence.
It is filled still with the busyness of humans.

I need true silence.

They say the deeper underground you go
the more silent the earth becomes.
Until you realise
that the silence of the earth
is actually too a deep rumbling.
A humming.
Not of electric wires or car engines,
but of molten earth. Under our feet.
The molten core of the earth,
It is, quite literally, as hot as the sun.

And it is this truth that brings me now
into true silence. Knowing that I stand
on the energy of a sun. That we stand
on the sun. And still we are alive.
And still we are alive. Woah. Amazing. Silence.

A Walk With My Baby Girl.

The way we walked down the street
always mattered.

It was hand-in-hand,
at the traffic lights.

It was pavement crack,
tight-rope walking.

Jumping shadow to shadow,
the light is lava,
the darkness a friend.

It was slowing down
to see the daisy as it
pushed up the dirt.

To take the dirt
and rub it into our skin.

To hold our skin
out into the warmth
of the sun.

It was this playground
followed by that one.

It was joy.
Pure and simple.
Don't you remember,
when you were just a kid.
and everything still shimmered?

These Two Hands

On the mountaintops of Nepal,
amidst jungle and rugged path
there lives a man who walks
upside-down.

Truly. Hands to the ground.
Palms to the dirt.
Since birth,
he has dragged his body
along rocky earth.

Wheelchairs are useless
along the mountain path,
so hands must become feet,
rubber sandals on palms.
Don't you dare tell me
that lameness makes a man weak.
His biceps alone could crush these lungs.

He is no less because he is not able-bodied.
His body has made him able.
He does not sit idle. Whilst all the time
I idolise my own capability.

His name is Punya Prashad.
Every morning he rises with the sun,
palms to dirt, he works the earth,
as he turns a barren plot
into 150 trees yielding 300 bananas
and the garden is bringing in the food
he needs to feed his three children
and to sell at the market.

Don't you dare tell me
that lameness makes a man weak.

I have it easy in life.
I know that I do.
These two hands,
these two feet,
walk to a privileged beat. Beat. Beat.
Nothing gonna beat, beat me down.
Cause it cant reach, reach me up here,
on my own mountaintop.
These clouds can be blinding.

I don't know what it is to be desperate.
To hunger and thirst.
Food on the table. Roof over my head.
These things I am thankful for,
said at the beginning of the meal. Amen.
*'Thank you for the food. Amen.
Thank you for the shelter. Amen.
Thank you for these two hands.
These two feet. Amen.'*

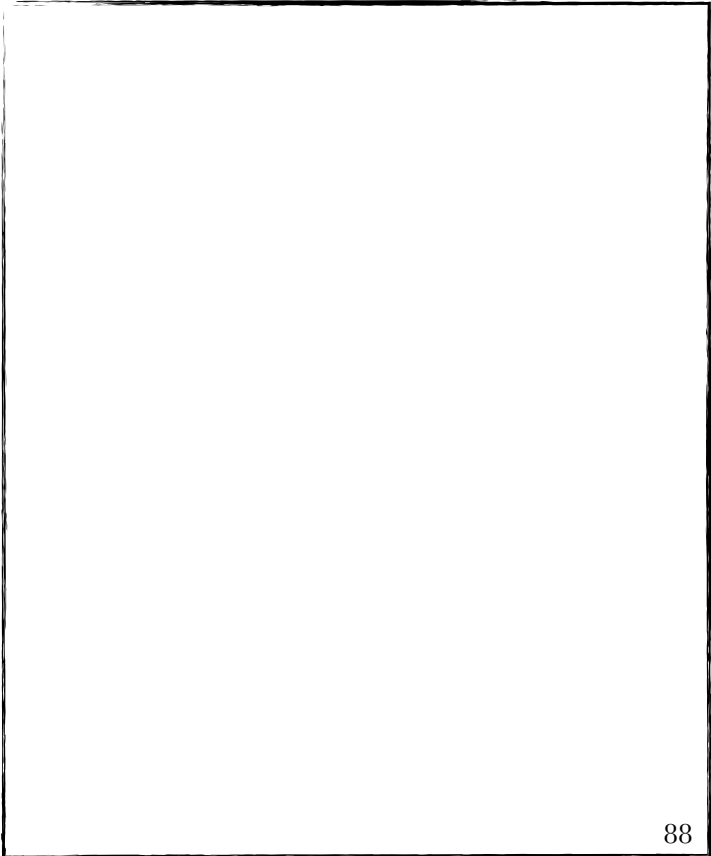
But Punya Prashad,
I sit now at your lame feet,
and I ask you to teach me.

Teach me of strength.
Teach me of resilience and persistence.
Teach me of my own lameness.
Teach me how to see.
Teach me how to listen.
Teach me...
Teach me...
Teach me...



Ordinary Heroes Poetry Prompt

Have you ever met someone like Punya Prashad? I am sure that you have. An ordinary person who is certain to wear a superhero cape underneath their clothes. I wonder, who is an ordinary hero that you could introduce the world to through a poem? Maybe they're a family friend. Or a next door neighbour. Or someone you read about. Write about them now.

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for writing a poem. The box is positioned below the text prompt and occupies most of the lower half of the page.

The Circus

My life is a circus.
An act I have re-enacted
a thousand times.

I would stick my head into a lion's mouth
if it would make you laugh.

The paint on my face
hides the scars on my skin.

The words that I speak
are but lines scribed to my mind
of all these things that you say
I am meant to say.

So, with a smile to the audience,
I twist on the tightrope tensions of my life.
I balance here between
 hero and friend
 and leader and lonely
 and wisdom and folly
 and truth and lies.

The gravity of who I am
 and who I could be.
The guilt of what I should be.
The grace of what I can be.
The rope beneath me
 feels stretched and frayed.
I balance and teeter
and correct and hope I can hide
these faltering steps from you.

I smile to the audience
one more time. Yet I see
you are not even watching me.
You are not even the audience.

You too are the cast.
You too with costumes and masks.
You play your part
and dance your steps.

But if we are all the cast
then who is our audience?
Who is actually watching?
Who am I performing for?

Perhaps it's time to stop the show.
Walk backstage.
Wipe off the make-up.
Take off the clown-suit.
And just have a cup of tea
with the people that I love.



Australia

This land where red dust gathers
under pavement city streets
in towns built from the hands
of those who do not belong here.

And they were my hands.
And they were the hands
of my ancestors.

I am from convict and from settler,
from those who stole the land.

I cannot speak of my love of this place
shy of lament for what has gone before,
for what continues to this day.
There is a wound in this nation.
It still bleeds. Did you realise?

The red fire in my skin:
lines of a sunburnt country.
I am from eucalyptus
crushed in the palm,
hands stained
with the smoke
of stack chimneys.

I am from desert sun bent low.
I am from sea salt air
dripping too long from the clouds.
I am from the stony ground.
I am drenched in the ocean,
scorched in the sun.

I am from the city.
These buildings surround us.
I walk their streets,
the chaos of the pace
of high- rise slaves,
sky-scrappers,
paper chasers,
Price Waterhouse Coopers
and Crown Casino.

Beneath concrete tower prisons,
under the sweat of the city,
under the stains of where she bleeds,
under the cracks in her pavements,
beneath the smell of the masses,
I can still taste the country beneath her,
muddy rivers that water her.

I still believe that beneath it all
there is something that lives
and breathes and pulses.
Something that holds us.
Do you feel it too?



Ask the people
who were kicked off their land.
They will tell you.
They have told me.
A living being, all around us.
A heartbeat beneath our feet.
Don't let the city tell you otherwise.
Don't ignore it. Listen friend.
Put your hand to the ground
and listen.

Education

The earth is a classroom.

These mountains,
my textbook.

The ocean,
a teacher.

The geography
of the desert.

The geometry
of the night sky.

The grammar
of a kookaburra calling.

We arise every day,
schooled in nature's wisdom,
should we learn how to listen.

Advance Australia...Where?

Australians all let us...regress
For we may be young,
but are not all free.
We've blood drenched soils
and wealth...for some.
Our Minds are girt by TV.

Our homes abound in Ikea's gifts
of booty, glitz and despair.

For, in history's page,
let every stage,
finance Australia's millionaires.

In lamentful strains, now let us weep.
Advance Australia...where?

For Beneath our radiant...neon signs,
I'll sell my heart and hands.
To make this very wealth of mine
renowned throughout this land.

And for those who've come
across the seas
we've boundless plains
we shall NOT share.

With egotism let us all divide
to never make Australia fair.

In selfish strains then let us sing,
Advance Australia...where?



Parody Poetry Prompt.

The poems above are two very different types of poetry about Australia. The first is free-verse poetry. The second is a parody. A parody takes something familiar, like the Australian National Anthem, and, through a deliberate humorous re-writing, it encourages the audience to think about this familiar form in a new way. So I was attempting to show the gap between what our Anthem calls us to, and what the reality of Australia might actually be. What is a familiar form you could twist and play with in a humorous way? For an easy way into this, what if you grab a hit song that you love, and then do a re-write of it, in the same rhythm as the original, but with new words. See how you go...

Notes on Entering the Large World

There is a bonfire that waits for you,
on a cold winter's night. So come,
take your place by the firelight.
Sit around the embers with your elders and
listen to their wisdom.

Let their words be the breath
that fills the bellows
that blazes all around
until the furnace burns hot enough
that the blacksmith may shape,
not a sword, but a shovel.

Then start your life,
with the digging of a hole.

Plant a tree in the hole
of your dreams
and water its seed
until you sit in its shade.

Pluck its fruit.

Invite the world
to eat a meal,
to wash their feet,
to greet their sons,
to love their mothers,
to hold their chins high,
to look you in the eye,
to know their name,
to break the chains,
to begin again,
to ride the waves,

raise the anchor,
sail the seas,
bang the drum,
split the rock,
chop the wood, carry the water.

Build a house from your life,
not to live in,
not of brick and mortar,
of buildings and bedrooms.
Build... a cubby house,
in a tree, in the forest,
make sure it's enchanted,
call it a castle.
Drink tea with the pixies there,
play chess with gnomes,
pick berry's from the bushes nearby
and eat a royal feast.

Never think you are too old
to play pretend,
to imagine away
a busy world full of problems.
Your problems
will still be there in the morning
but the fairies
would have left at dawn.

So never let your eyes
become over familiarised.

Stay wide-eyed
and wide open
to a world that
is always speaking.

And let the breeze
blow through you,
as leaves clap hands
to applaud the wind
and so the trees
awake from their slumber.



So you too...
slumber no more.
I have heard your ROAR.
It shook this cubby house
and broke the floor.
So stand and bellow.

Write the world anew.
And look around you,
for there are pens
in the palms of every passerby.

So how about you offer
to be the first paper
that they write upon.

Let them ink their words
upon your forearms.
Let them write their stories
on your soul.

Go into this very large world friends,
with eyes wide open,
arms outstretched,
hands cupped before you,
quivering though they may be.

The End

But, what more shall you now write?