

CELEBRATE WORLD POETRY DAY

A free resource by one of the authors of the Opening
Doors series, Leah Crawford



This is a **FREE** resource by one of the authors of the *Opening Doors series*, Leah Crawford, to share with your pupils:

World Poetry Day

established by UNESCO in 1999 to promote cultural expression, preserve language and foster creativity.

The theme for 2025 is: **“Poetry as a Bridge for Peace and Inclusion”**

“Arranged in words, coloured with images, struck with the right meter, the power of poetry has no match. As an intimate form of expression that opens doors to others, poetry enriches the dialogue that catalyses all human progress and is more necessary than ever in turbulent times.”

Audrey Azoulay, Director General of UNESCO

In short, the need to enter, explore and create poetry together may be greater than ever.

The poem explored in this lesson plan is an intimate, poignant portrait of the impact of forced migrancy. Although it moves towards hope, teachers should want to privately prepare any students in their class who are refugees or migrants that this subject will be explored through poetry.

Pre-reading: create readiness and connections

Explain to students that you are about to read a poem titled '**Unbroken**'.

Arrange students in **discussion pairs or triads** with clear guidelines as to turn-taking, listening and being prepared to share a group response to each task or question.

- * First think of a simple object that is not worth a lot of money, but means a lot to you – you would be upset if it were to be broken. Share this in turn with your pair/group. Come together as a whole class to classify what kinds of things these objects are, rather than simply list them. What makes an object meaningful to us?
- * So far we have thought about concrete objects. Can we think of abstract notions that can be broken? Give students brief discussion time, adding a nudge like 'for example, a broken heart' if they are stuck.
- * They may share ideas like friendship, a promise, trust, a tie or bond, even a spell!
- * Go back to the word **unbroken**.
- * The prefix 'un' reverses the meaning of a word. What words would we normally use to describe an object being put back together? E.g. fixed, mended, repaired.
- * Which do the students think is easier to 'unbreak': a concrete object or an abstract feeling?

Reveal a sliver of text:

Read together:

The china cup was my mother's,
The one small thing of beauty in her harsh life.
It held her smile, her hands as rough and gnarled as
branches
With their tender touch.

- Clarify that a cup made of china is a finer, more delicate object than one made of other kinds of clay like terracotta or earthenware. You could share real or pictorial examples.
- We have the voice of a son or daughter talking about their mother. What have they suggested about her? Try to find contrasts in these first few lines to help you.
- **What could the speaker mean by the word 'held'?**

Taster draft

Think of an object that ‘holds’ a lot about you – perhaps the object you thought about at the start of the lesson, or an object that ‘holds’ a lot about someone else close to you.

You could use this grid as a thinking engine to see which ideas have a spark and which are harder to pursue.

Object	Description perhaps including a contrast	What does it ‘hold’ about its owner
A cuddly rabbit	Tattered and worn with daily love.	It holds memories of dark, soft nights in a bunkbed above my sister and escape from nightmares.
A faceless Lego man key-ring		
A scuffed football boot		

Now take your best idea and craft it into a more poetic layout, using line breaks to control your reader’s pauses and pace as they journey through the images and mood you have created.

Before reading the whole poem, share this line:

‘what is broken cannot be unbroken’

Ask pairs/triads to discuss how far they agree:

☛ In relation to an object?

☛ In relation to an abstract like trust, faith, the heart?

Reveal the whole poem:

Unbroken

The china cup was my mother's,
The one small thing of beauty in her harsh life.
It held her smile, her hands as rough and gnarled as branches
With their tender touch.
I carried it across continents and oceans,
The one small thing of beauty in my lost life.
It held my endurance and my patience.

Today it broke.
I can no longer endure.
I can no longer be patient.
My rage consumes me,
For what is broken cannot be unbroken.
Our shattered past,
Our fractured future
are beyond mending.

My daughter takes the shards.
With her granny's tender touch,
she pieces them together.
Patient when it seems they do not fit.
Enduring when their edges cut her fingers.
She hands me back the cup, whole.
"Unbroken," she says.
"Unbroken!"

© Nicola Davies, from *Choose Love*, Graffeg 2022

- Read the poem once for the class, then read it again, asking students to think about how the china cup can mean so much to the speaker when it was not their cup.
- Now ask groups of students to prepare a reading of the poem, thinking particularly about how the mood of the speaker changes. You could use a colour coding system to help them to map this with pencils:



- What adjective could describe the lines that are not sitting at the extremes of this continuum? Are they mixed feelings? Vulnerable, or tentative?
- You could ask students to use a more complex mark-up code to guide their decisions as they prepare a reading.

Rhythm and phrasing

Mark-up codes

/ short pause

// long pause

↗ rising tone

↘ falling tone

___ word emphasis/stress

↓ slow down

↑ speed up

The big Opening Doors question

Opening Doors to a rich and literary text for all is ultimately about supporting a response to its global or overall effect. What holds this poem together is the powerful symbolism of the china cup – so our central question brings students back to this. The radial questions below enable teachers and students to enter this central question in manageable ways, seeing how part relates and builds to a whole. There is also the space for students to build their own route to deeper understanding, choosing their own pathway of questions.

Why is the cup china, not pottery or clay? Why as a refugee would the speaker take something so easily breakable with her?

What meaning links the words held, consumed and whole and why they are important in the poem? Look for another pathway of linked words that appears through the poem and builds an echo of meaning.

Why might the final line of speech be in italics?

How does the poet transform the story of a china cup into a symbol of hope?

Why does the poet put the word 'unbroken' in the granddaughter's mouth, not 'fixed' or 'mended'?

How can a past or a future be broken?

We have 3 stanzas that focus in turn on the mother, speaker and granddaughter. Which words appear in all three stanzas? Why include this echo?

Most of the poem is written in grammatical sentences apart from these two lines which have no main subject and verb: 'She is..' is implied but not included. Why might the poet have broken grammar rules at this point?

Patient when it seems they do not fit. Enduring when their edges cut her fingers.

Excellent responses could include:

- How simple objects can hold value and meaning far beyond their material worth or usefulness
- How the use of near synonyms like held, consume and whole show how an emotion can be shared, can ripple through the generations as it is passed on and adapts
- How the breaking of grammar structures can create a shock stillness and delicacy of mood
- How the central broken image 'holds' the pain of a refugee's flight from their homeland, representing broken identity, broken ties and broken hope
- How the oddity of the word unbroken holds more hope, warmth and humour in the mouth of the young granddaughter than a more logical word 'fixed'
- How the echoing words tender, endure and patient hold the hope of the family heritage just like the china cup

Further link reading:

The poem **Unbroken** has been shared with kind permission of the poet, Nicola Davies, whose anthology, **Choose Love**, illustrated by Petr Horacek was written for and inspired by the charity www.chooselove.org who provide practical support for refugees as well as elevating the voices and experiences of those who are fleeing and displaced. You can listen to her introduce the work [here](#). The anthology comprises a cycle of stories from departure to the fragile hope of resettlement. Nicola used, with permission, real stories of forced migration to inspire the voices in the anthology.

The Suitcase by Chris Naylor Ballesteros and **Teacup** by Rebecca Young and Matt Ottley can introduce the pain of migrancy and the symbolism of the fragile perhaps impractical object of the teacup to younger children in a primary school.

The Journey by Francesca Sanna is another powerful picture book in which a refugee tale is told through narrative yet symbolic stylised images.

Childhood Tracks by James Berry evokes the poet's vivid sensory memories from his childhood in Jamaica before he migrated to England. His sense of value, yearning and loss is unspoken yet present in the poem.

Windrush Child by John Agard, another Windrush generation poet encapsulates the experience of so many post WW2 children leaving a loved Caribbean homeland for the promise of the English 'motherland'.

Island Man by Grace Nichols takes the reader into the waking, morning of a migrant from the Caribbean waking up in grey, urban London, their mind and spirit still yearning for their previous island home.

Refugees by Brian Bilston is a powerful and more overtly political poem that represents and then renounces an anti-refugee mentality.

My Face is a Map by Jackie Kay builds a witty yet poignant metaphor of the map of identity that can be read in the face of those of us with mixed heritage. You can hear her read it [here](#).

When Stars are Scattered by Omar Mohamed and Victoria Jamieson is a graphic novel of two brothers in a refugee camp in Kenya, waiting to return to their homeland of Somalia and is based on Mohamed's own life experience.

The Power of Welcome illustrated by Ada Jusic is an anthology of real-life refugee and migrant stories from across the globe told in graphic novel form.

Wings to Fly

This is a classroom moment with real potential, but given the poignancy and sensitivity of the identity and migrancy theme needs careful handling. We would not wish to force students to write something for which they are not ready. They may choose to:

- Extend the symbolic potential of the object in their taster draft. What will happen to the object over time – pushed to the back of a cupboard, lost in a drawer, perhaps found 30 years later by a younger family member?
- Write their own 'Childhood Tracks' poem like James Berry, closing their eyes and bringing alive the sights, sounds, smells and tastes that bring their childhood or their homeland alive, captured in poetry like a time capsule.
- Students may have their own experience of leaving home, or know people who have chosen or been forced to leave their homeland. Can they capture through memory or dialogue, the moment of leaving and imagining the destination, like John Agard? Or include a flashback to their home like in *Island Man*?

About the poet and poem:

Nicola Davies is the author of more than 80 books including picture books, non-fiction, fiction and poetry for children and adults. She has written widely on many subjects including environmental science, children's rights, disability, grief and refugees. Recently two of her titles *The Day War Came* and *The King of the Sky* were endorsed by Amnesty UK.

Choose Love, nominated for a Carnegie award, is a cycle of poems that highlights the experience of those forced to become refugees. The core of the collection was written in 2018 as part of a project with the charity Refugee Trauma Initiative (RTI).

With the permission of both individual refugees and aid workers, RTI shared with Nicola a number of true and poignant stories which were then used as the basis for short-form poems. Over the following years Nicola has added to this core of poems to create a coherent collection on the theme of forced migration, its wider causes and consequences.

About the author of the lesson:

Leah Crawford has a career in education spanning 30 years, with 15 years of experience as a local authority English inspector and adviser, working across both the primary and secondary phases. She now leads Thinktalk education consultancy, is proud to be an Opening Doors author and consultant and a tutor for King's College London's Let's Think in English cognitive acceleration programme. She has spent her career in education championing equitable and inclusive dialogic teaching and learning.

To find out more about Leah and the Opening Doors series, visit her website: <https://leahcrawford.com>

You can also find Leah on Bluesky [@thinktalkleah.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/thinktalkleah.bsky.social)

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Visit the Crown House Publishing website for more on the series: <https://www.crownhouse.co.uk/opening-doors>

