

**Pamela Robertson-Pearce, photographer and poet:** good stuff!

**Sian Hughes, lawyer:** "I have just read these poems on the train. They are all truly wonderful and really evoke a sense of place and what it is like to be in that place. I read a lot of stuff written by adults and these poems have touched me more than most of the stuff usually read. Keep going! Sian xx"

**Judi Sutherland, poet:** "top poetry"

**Nick Allen, poet:** "These poems are full of young people looking across the threshold out at the wider world - perhaps for the first time - safe in the knowledge that their familiar home of sofa, X-factor and mum's "spag bol" is still at their backs. There is no misty-eyed idealism about the place they live in, they know what their home is: three poems talk of "smackheads", another of "a place where people get stabbed", of hospital visits and of running home in the dark. These are not easy lives.

And they compare them, cleverly, compassionately with the even more difficult lives of those with no choice other than to flee their own homes: refugees. There is also a beautiful realization that it OK for them to talk, or write about this, and that they too have a voice".

**Deborah Newbold, playwright and actor:** When you come from a background that doesn't feel it has a claim to things like poetry, it feels almost too hard to take the first step, and take yourself seriously enough to write. It's harder still to be as honest, fresh, unclinged and direct as these young poets are. I am so impressed with all of them and wish my 12 year old self could have been in those sessions alongside them. How inspiring that would have been. The poems in this anthology all have an open-ness and a focus that shines. To the poets: believe in yourselves and keep writing. It's all there for you, no matter where you come from. Be proud of who you are. And keep looking out, and listening. Beautiful work. xx

**Carol Bromley, poet:** What an inspirational project and what a great bunch of young people. Reading the anthology with its clear evidence of discovering the joy of writing poetry and sharing it was a moving experience. These poets have a clear-eyed love and pride in their home town which made me want to go there. Whether writing about shepherds pie or watching X Factor or empathising with the plight of Syrian refugees, these young poets with their raw but very real talent prove that poetry is for all of us. Keep writing. You're amazing!

**Kelly Drake, artist and management consultant:** "Thank you for sharing and helping these kids find a creative voice. Brilliant work. There's a show in this too"

**Catherine Ayres, poet:** "Proper choked at these. Immensely talented young poets. These poems are about small things which are really huge things. They're playful and serious and beautiful and I love them. Keep writing because what you say matters and the way you all write is mint. x"

**Gill Lambert, poet:** I love them all. Brilliant stuff. I bet you're proud as anything

**Charlotte Ansell, poet:** wow, great work by these young poets. I like particularly that there is a directness to these poems, an honesty- telling about their world like it is- with immediacy and original descriptions. it's great the way all the poems pay attention to the senses - you feel like you are there with them and the emotions are powerful... .. they should all be very proud that they have used words so beautifully to express themselves...

**Jane Burn, poet and artist:** Can I just say that I am stunned and moved by all the work I have read. I am a working class writer who learned very late to have some self belief. No matter where you come from or where you go, you have this incredible life inside of you all and it is

magical to read it here. Such talent. Don't any of you ever give up or let someone put you down xxxx

**Steve Lyons, poet:** Good stuff. Raw. Like having a shave with sandpaper. Good teacher. You should be very proud of the kids 'n' yourself

**Marina Sandfield, social worker:** I read them all. They brought me to tears. Everyone had written extraordinary things, phrases and sentences that are still sitting with me. I'm really impressed by the level of maturity in the writing. I had to check twice so confirm the age of your students! Thanks for sharing.

**Jackie Jones, artist:** I don't actually think they need any advice but to keep writing, the rawness of language makes them more emotive. Don't polish them up and lose the truth of them. Great work tell them keep writing!!!

**Leslie Quayle, poet:** These poems are simply incredible. There's an honesty and clarity in them which is both refreshing and disturbing. Let's face it, these kids have grasped something and put it into words which leave the rest of us pretty awestruck. Clare Shaw must be a bloody amazing teacher and should be very proud of herself and these words and these kids. X

**Boris Tinky, nurse:** "Your words just gave me a massive punch in the gut and reminded me to LISTEN much much harder. Keep saying it as it is you amazing human beans xx"

**Rebecca Yorke, museum curator:** "Raw, powerful, brilliant stuff. I have two words for these poets - keep writing"

**Annie Gilyard, artist and nurse:** "I ain't a poet but I could read these all day. Don't give up you amazing young people".

**Jenni Herbert, NHS:** They are amazing and I hope they write some more. I want to read more of their poetry.. fantastic. Xxxx 

**Barbara M Smith, poet:** The poems are rich in visual and sensory detail. I am so impressed. They should deservedly feel proud

**Vicky Barwood, nurse:** What amazing talent.. Believe in yourselves (as I do) and keep using your words and voices to be heard. Xx

**Jilly Bellamy, NCT:** Thank you so much for sharing these poems and these poets (for real, actual poets they truly are). I felt chills, I felt disquiet, I felt empathy, I felt unnerved and amazed and impressed. I wish I could write like that. I hope these young poets carry on writing. They're beyond excellent. Thank you

**Patricia Guilfoyle, nurse:** Really really good. Shock and honesty, real sadness and mystery xx

**Louise Wallwein, poet and playwright:** These are excellent poems. All of them conjure up pictures in my head. Poems can be like a film for the mind and all these poems do that for me. All of these poems have crystal clear truth in them.

**Rachel Bentham, poet, editor and lecturer:** "Wow its hard to believe these poems were written by people who are so young- because they're so accomplished already! They are really communicating what it's like to be in this place, to come from this place and to have loyalty as well to the other people there - and even to the harshness of the place itself. Poetry is all about communicating emotion, those ideas and these kids have totally achieved it. I hope they can hang on to their Talent and know that living is about understanding and feeling more than anything else..."

**Dona Smith, art therapist:** Their words are powerful and the creative voice speaks. They should all be proud of what they have achieved and continue to speak create and believe in their own unique voices

**Richard Skinner, author:** these are amazing poems by amazing kids. They should be proud of themselves and what they have achieved so far. Well done them! Faber Academy would be proud to call them alumni.

**Ceinwen Paynton, National Trust:** "What I love most about these poets is their ability to paint pictures with words. They are playing with the language to create descriptions that make you feel that you are seeing what they are seeing and sensing the atmosphere of the places that they describe. Thanks for sharing such personal feelings and beautiful writing. I'm 45 and wish that I could write like that.

**Stephen Payne, poet:** "I like poems that move me, that make me want to smile and cry at the same time, poems that make me want to get to know their writers. All these poems are like that. I also love the short quotes at the top of each poem! I want to visit Workington, -- it sounds a lot like where I was brought up, Stockton-on-Tees, but with extra seagulls. What a great time you all must have had, talking and not-talking, digging out and writing down the striking, smelly details from your memories.

**Nadine Wills, Youth Offending:** "Wow. Brilliant, real, punch to the gut, talented, emotive, grit! LOVE these poems. Keep writing -your voices are amazing. Best poetry I've read in ages x"

**Jacqui Wicks, musician and singer:** I love these poems. I hope the writers realise what a brilliant glimpse they've given us into their lives and community. Please thank them x"

**Carol, former Head of English:** These pupils have obviously learned that poetry is " of the soul " and it allows them to speak about who they are....which they have achieved with a high degree of success. I especially like that they have not been restricted by writing conventions but some have been supported by a framework. Their comments on their world alongside examination of wider world-issues is sensitive and wonderful to read. The world of Poetry is now open to them.Lucky people! Carol, former Head of English for 25 years

**Catrina Rose Yule:** "Wonderful, extraordinary poems. Well done every single one of you! ❤️  
❤️

**Chris Clarke, poet:** Beautiful honest words that must come from amazing souls. Well done to all. Please keep writing. X

**Ellen Quenell, therapist:** Clare, I was overwhelmed by how good these poems were. While I read them I was transported to so many places: back to my childhood, to the streets and houses of Workington, to holiday memories, to frightening times in hospitals, to the perils of escaping from Syria. For me, each and every poem had a gem in it – a beautiful description, a skilfully crafted metaphor, or a visceral description that I could physically feel. I haven't written any poetry for forty years but am so inspired by reading these that I am going to write my own version of 'I come from'! I have refugees staying at my house and with the children's permission I'd like to show them the poems about Syria.

## **Sarah Dixon, poet and compere: Feedback on every poem in the anthology**

Ellie speaks well of not belonging and of not knowing where she fits or much about the world she fits within. I think everyone can empathise with this feeling of being physically or emotionally lost and I hope she doesn't feel alone in this.

Kelvin: I love the line 'all Drake's songs are playing'. I am wondering if this is Nick Drake because that is the Drake I would go to, but I suspect it is not as the next line says 'tunes are banging'. 'A room full of consoles and trophies' hints at empty victories and a need for something more than this. Looked up Drake and enjoyed video and music.

Caitlan: The beginning of this poem pulls me straight in. Both setting the scene and suggesting the past in ten words 'we are in the car now/but we didn't start here'. Right, already I am hooked. I was a little confused by CFM, so I looked this up and am more confused. Cubic feet per metre, condenser fan motors (I use this abbreviation in my day job), these don't feel right so I assume this is a band. Ah yes, a band and I enjoyed discovering them so I can understand the poem more.

Abigail: I enjoyed the repetition and the change from 'I come from...' at the start of the last sentence. The shift is powerful and I love the linking of the river to belonging. I find the water near home is a huge part of where I live and who I am. 'I come from the River Derwent/I especially belong to my family.'

Sam: Love the 'I was'. The comparison of 'you' and 'other' produces a powerful piece here. Particularly like the running over of lines and choices of line endings to add pauses. Your 'I come from' made me feel both safe and that there is some menace. Well conjured.

Ben: I love the enthusiasm in this piece and the joy in the details – the light that is from the pool and become part of the watcher. I think the 'beast in the cage' and the 'roast potato' work really well as imagery.

Callum: I enjoyed this especially the line where you come from sounds. Sound is such an evocative place to come from 'drier tumbling, birds singing, wind howling.' 'I come from the smell of Steak Bakes burning./I come from people shouting and people singing./I come from the smell of the sea on the mountain.' These last three lines say so much.

Daniel: Love the chaos and the imagination in this one. Especially when it felt like you were becoming the animals in the poem and the zooming in from space to the smallest details. And 'The water is blurry as a blind man' loved that.

Danielle: 'I can taste the sadness of the ocean' cleverly links salt water to tears and the journey being made without telling us that in detail. And the fear of the unknown, so little know about the new place. 'What if there is no home,/no horses, no nothing? /I want to turn back.' is such a powerful way to end the poem.

Emily: I love the way all the detail builds to a really powerful final line. The fact that there may be fear earlier in the poem, but the speaker does not voice this fear until the last three lines 'I'm afraid of the dark blue waves.' Is a very strong way to finish the piece.

Ethan: I am not totally sure what this poem is about, but this doesn't matter as it is gripping without knowing all the details. It hints of hospitals and clinical white and a trappedness and escape. 'I took a deep breath and/the doors opened.' this line, such a relief.

Dylan: Some killer lines in this poem leave you breathless. Particularly these two: 'this I do not want to do./This I call slavery.' 'Leaving my warm and homely mud behind/with its sweet scent that only I like.'

Jude: This is punchy and the short lines with no punctuation works well in delivering the speed and chaos of emergencies – a very skilful, creative poem.

Megan: I love the brevity of this and also the fact it tells us so much in such a short piece. Love the 'land of the leprechaun and kangaroo' line. 'I come from' love the spag bol forever being cooked we has mince three times a week when I was younger and this made me smile. Also like the viewpoint of the pig.

Cameron: Love Rocky poem. The fact his coming to the house was precious and he brought value along with the fact he was not best treated and would never be a show dog. 'His breath was rotten cheese, his legs were bruised./ But his eyes were black pearls where light reflected/blinding everyone around.' Love the fact he changes people around him.

Matthew: I like your comment about the fresh book. I think you capture the fear of the unknown well and the fact that leaving somewhere we know as home is often unthinkable: 'I hope I will never experience this again./I'm afraid it will happen again.'

Nathaniel: I am not sure whether there is a real or an imagined foe in this poem but the pivot where it is all changes is : 'The words don't fall/ over and over again.' And I find that this suggests fists or the person falls, but words won't come to stop this happening.

Ellie: The pauses and delaying in this poem are understandable and feel a very human reaction to knowing something dark was going to happen. We don't know whose death is mentioned in this poem, but I don't think we need to know. Great poem.

Daniel C: This is a powerful piece. Particularly the lines 'Everyone has the same expression... Cold lifeless faces unsure of what will happen.' The fact the narrator has no home, no family even if they could return there. This line made me cry: 'I remember running to my children. I held them both tightly as the sparkle died out in their eyes, as they slowly faded away.'

Chloe: 'I come from a red glossy box which stops me from entering the real world.' I am guessing this is a mobile phone and it true and a brilliant description if so. Sorry if I have misunderstood and misread this. 'I come from a place where nothing exists, /where I feel like I belong.' The search for belonging and finding somewhere that feels right is difficult and this captures the feeling well.

Caitlan P: This line captures well the fear and the continuation of this fear every day. 'The car draws you nearer,/like something from a nightmare./One that never stops.' Powerful poem.

Matthew F: Delighted to find that Megadeth are still listened to. I am a fan myself. Love the way the choices about bedroom colours become where you come from 'a bedroom with grey walls and red sheets.' 'I come from the sea and the mountains./It's not much but it's where I come from.'. I like the way these lines talk down where the narrator has come from but also has a pride in it at the same time.

Scarlett: I love the details in this, especially : 'I come from a street with multicoloured houses./I come from uneven ground and chipped paint. ' and the way it brings in swimming and warmth. Lovely. Great poem.

Ellie E: I love the echo of colour all the way through this poem red/yellow/silver and the fact we are both there now and in the past at once. I enjoyed the fact that the narrator knows something no-one else does – like letting the reader in on a secret: 'There was a statue with bricks that had markings /and the water on top/had ripples that no-one could see.

## **The Workington Anthology – 25 young poets**

**by Amanda Dalton**

I feel really honoured to have been given the chance by Clare Shaw to read this anthology of poems. They're so good – full of fantastically fresh images, powerful atmospheres and an honesty that has stayed with me for ages after reading. It's as though all of these young people have not only looked and listened with great sensitivity, they've also tasted, touched and really felt the worlds they're writing about.

There's so much feeling in these poems but they're beautifully contained, down to earth and 'held'. I think this is because these young people haven't been afraid to write in their own voices. They're developed the confidence to know that their voice is worth listening to and they should be proud to express themselves. They have so much to say that's worth hearing and I hope they can hang on to this belief in themselves – a belief that so many of them have expressed in the little quotes at the top of the poems. I think poetry is a fantastic way of making sense of our lives and connecting with one another, and the most brilliant way of expressing ourselves and communicating. These poems give the reader a whole universe of feeling and ideas and observations that are absolutely owned by the young writers but that anyone reading the poems can also relate to and recognise. There's great power in this – not trying to write fancy words but finding particular, clear images that are personal and truthful; -hey will speak volumes to everyone who reads them.

Some of the worlds in these poems are really close to home, the world the young writers live in every day, and there's a great, moving honesty in what they write about home and neighbourhood. These poems don't shy away from expressing things that are painful and tough; and they show a really mature understanding of how the good and the bad, hard and easy, nightmarish and heart-warming so often sit side by side in life. This is writing that is coming from deep inside – it's brave and truthful and its wholly alive.

I loved also to read poems that explored journeys, places far and near, other peoples' lives. I love how they often zoom in on tiny details and then pan out like a camera showing us whole landscapes and snatches of other people's stories, and I'm very moved by how they show so much care for others and sometimes even go so far as to inhabit the voices of other people. Reading these poems, I feel quite sure that the writers absolutely know how to put themselves into other people's shoes and see how all of us, whatever our lives, wherever we live, are connected to one another.

There's great variety in this anthology; every single voice is unique, special and sings off the page. And there isn't a single tired, clichéd image or idea in the whole anthology; it's honest and brave and remarkably accomplished. Truly fantastic; a great achievement.

**Amanda Dalton**

Poet

Playwright

Education Director at Manchester Royal Exchange

**Jackie Hagan, poet, playwright and stand up comedian:**

To the kids in St Joseph's, Workington.

Why writing is dead important –

1. It's somewhere to go when you don't have a place of your own.
2. It'll help you to not go mad when you have to face things in life that might send you mad.
3. The reason we think poetry is posh is because people who are in charge of it often are, so it's their voices and stories that get heard, but our stories are more important - we're funnier and grittier.
4. Working class people talk in a really poetic way, not like flowers and flourishes but like vivid, smelly, colourful, melodramatic - we use language in creative ways. We're brilliant at it.
5. People ignore us all the time, if you say it in a weird way that really gets to the core of it they're more likely to listen.
6. You can teach yourself to be more convincing and get what you want by using words cleverly.
7. Some really stupid people think that if you're poor or you've got a proper accent then you're thick, if we speak like poets sometimes we can convince them people to take notice and take us seriously.
8. You are not stupid.
9. You've lived this life. You've got something to say, you've got loads.
10. It's cheap".

Kim Moore, poet:

To the pupils of St Joseph's, Workington:

First of all I wanted to say congratulations on writing some brilliant poems that made me cry, smile and laugh, sometimes in the same poem. And congratulations on discovering that poetry is for you, that language is powerful, and that it can change things. I know this because poetry changed my life so I know it can do huge things. I found your words very moving, maybe because I think we come from a similar town, in a similar place.

I am writing this to you all from the airport at Manchester. I'm about to go to Poland to read at a poetry festival. If somebody had told me when I was a teenager that I would be travelling around the world to read my poems, I would have laughed in their face. Nobody had told me when I was a teenager that I had anything worth saying, so I'm really glad you have found Clare Shaw and she has found you, and I hope you all realise by now that your words, your poems, your opinions are important and deserve to be shared.

I am also the Director of Kendal Poetry Festival, and I know Kendal is a long way away from you, even though it is the same county, but I'd like to offer all of you (the amazing poets included in this anthology) free tickets to come and hear any of the poetry readings going on throughout the weekend. The festival takes place 7th-9th September. We can also offer a free ticket for an adult if you'd like to bring one along with you. I hope I get to meet some of you in Kendal, and introduce you to some of the young poets I work with here.

And lastly, I would like to leave you with some words from Audre Lorde: 'You cannot use someone else's fire; you can only use your own. And in order to do that, you must first be willing to believe you have it.'

## Feedback: a group poem

I remember the first time I wrote in this fresh book.  
I remember the moment when my English teacher read a few people's names  
and I was one of them.  
I remember switching from classroom to classroom and getting lost.  
I remember chairs screeching across the floor  
the tapping of pens the blank piece of paper the lads whispering at the back.  
I was happy because I missed RE.  
I could smell the trees the moss growing  
other people's paper full of writing  
people shouting door slamming bags rattling,  
the giant echoey hall.

I want to win the lottery. I want to get rich  
I want to be fluent in Russian, Japanese, Spanish, Mandarin and Welsh.  
I want to get better at video games, I want to travel the world.

When Callum poked Emily in the eye I learnt poetry can be anything.  
I had freedom to write what I wanted.  
I could imagine and dream.  
I wrote a lot of things till my hands ached  
I have learnt how to write fast and clear by forgetting about everything else.  
I'm not stupid as I thought.

I can do it if I push myself  
I want to be a chef  
I want to swim for a team

I learnt about William Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy  
I've learnt how to write poetry and where it comes from.  
I learnt to put my painful stories into poems  
I learnt other poets have been through a lot  
that travelling away from home is hard, the path is muddy  
and though the birds are singing, the wind is howling

I learnt to never give up  
to just keep on walking.