



Worksheet: Poetry

If freedom is a room with Imtiaz Dharker

Words are powerful, and writing poetry can give you ways to express your ideas about your life or how you want the world to be. One of the special things about poetry is how you can use it visually – you can decide where your lines stop and start, and this in itself can demonstrate your ideas.

Get writing:

1. Take a piece of paper and write at the top, 'if freedom is a room', then draw a box – a big square – and begin to think. The lines you have drawn are the walls of your room – *what if freedom is in that room?* **(07:20)**

Write sentences along the walls. Tell your reader about the walls:

- What are the walls made of?
- What do the walls feel and look like?
- Are the walls really there at all?

Carry on the following sentence:

'If freedom is a room, its walls are...'

Once you have your walls –

2. Imagine yourself in the middle of the square. Close your eyes. Remember a time in your own life when you had a strong sensation, either of being free or not feeling free at all. Write this memory in the middle of your square as the core of your poem. You can write more than a sentence this time. **(08:40)**

Remember: The power of your writing is in the detail. Tell your reader about your personal memory of that freedom or constriction in the middle of the room:

- What did your memory feel like?
- What sounds and smells did you associate with it?

Now you have your room – let's leave it:

3. Outside the walls, open a door, throw open the windows and get out of the room. Tell your reader what's outside your room: **(09:16)**

- What do you hear?
- What does it smell like or taste like?

Write these sentences outside the box.

Now you have the tools to make three verses of the poem. Use what you've made with your room to write three stanzas (a stanza is a verse) of a poem.

Start on a fresh sheet of paper using your notes as material. The structure of your poem uses:

- First verse – the walls of your room **(10:22)**
- Second verse – the middle of your room **(11:04)**
- Third verse - outside your room **(12:17)**

Remember: the main thing is your lines should sound good together. **Read your poem out loud once you've assembled it** – ask yourself:

- What holds your three verses together?
- Does it sound like a poem of three verses or three separate poems?
- How can you use language to make the verses sound like they belong together – what patterns can you use?

Bonus challenge:

Now you have the first draft of your poem, **begin to cut unnecessary words out. (13.13)**

One of the most powerful elements of poetic writing is what you choose not to say – don't be afraid to cut your lines down and use silence. When you've finished that, leave your poem for a while. Do something else and then come back and read your first draft and second draft. When you compare them:

- Can you see why your second draft is more powerful?
- Can you cut it down further?

About Imtiaz:

Imtiaz Dharker is an award-winning poet, artist and video film-maker whose poems have featured widely on BBC radio, television, the London Underground and on Mumbai buses. Imtiaz was born in Lahore, Pakistan and grew up in Glasgow, Scotland and the main themes of her work are home, freedom, displacement and gender.

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