WRITING A 'WHEN' POEM

by Laura Mucha

There's a LOT going on at the moment...

Closing schools, climate change, racism, not being able to see friends or family as different areas of the country are locked down, worries about getting sick – worries about the people we love getting sick, noticing and feeling the worries that the people around us have...

And some of the ways that help humans stay sane – like seeing friends or exercising – aren't always available at the moment.

But no matter what's going on in the outside world – or in the inside world of our minds – there's one thing that is always an option to most of us...

WRITING POEMS.

Poems can provide a small, safe space to explore what's going on, how we feel, what we're thinking. And that smallness can be reassuring when what is going on around us is very,

VERY

BIG.

COMING UP WITH IDEAS

(also known as

MAKING A MESS !)

To get you writing, I've come up with some exercises…

First of all, try to notice all the things that come to mind when you think about the future and the word 'when'. Try to think about good and bad things if you can. For example:

When will I be able to see my friends?

When will the virus go away?

When will I feel less worried?

When will school be back to normal?

When can I have a birthday party?

When will Dad be less stressed out?

When will we stop destroying our planet?

When will people treat me with kindness / be kind to me, even if / just because my skin colour is different to theirs?

Next, write down all the different things that come to mind when you think about 'when', referring to the way things used to be. For example:

When we could meet without masks

When I wasn't scared all the time

When humans didn't cut down so many trees

When I could see the smiles of strangers

When we didn't have to wash our hands all the time

When we weren't so bored, lonely, sad or happy stuck at home

When Mum / Dad / Grandpa / Grandma weren't so worried

Now try to think about what some of these sentences feel like. Could you try describing them in different ways, like how emotions feel in your body?

When I didn't feel heavy in my belly

When will I feel light again?

Could you try to think about all the senses? Could you describe the taste, smell, touch and sound of things, as well as what they look like?

When will I be able to hug my friends?

When will I be able to kiss Grandma?

When will I be able to taste Grandpa's cookies?

TIDYING UP

Now go through all your ideas and see if you can sort them into some sort of order.

You could try giving your poem the title *Do You Remember* and then listing some of your 'when' sentences to explore the past.

For example...

DO YOU REMEMBER

When we could see the smiles of strangers?

When...

When...

Or you might choose the title *I Wonder* or *Do You Know*

I WONDER

When I will feel less worried...

When...

When...

Or you might want to combine the past and the future in your poem in a structure you create yourself.

Once you've decided on your structure, think of your poem as a word-puzzle – and it's your job to put the best words in the best order possible.

- o Are there any rhymes in there?
- o Any patterns of sound you like?
- o What do you think is your best line? Can you put it last?
- o What are your weakest ideas? Can you cut them out?

Put your notes away for a few hours or days. You might notice that you think about it while you're brushing your teeth or tying your shoelaces. Let your mind work on the poem while you do other things and when you come back to it, think about whether you want to change anything.

YOU'VE FINISHED! HOORAY!

I hope you're happy with your poem. You don't have to share it with anyone – this poem might just be something you've written for yourself.

But you could share it with someone you trust – your teacher? Someone at home? A friend? You might inspire them to write their own poem…

Whether you share your poem or not, please remember that no matter what is going on in the world, you can use poetry to explore what that feels like for you on the inside.

About the author

Laura Mucha is an award-winning poet and author. She has won two international prizes for children's poetry, her poems have been featured on CBBC Newsround, BBC Radio 6 Music, BBC Radio 3 and Classic FM and her debut collection was one of the Independent's top ten poetry books this year.

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