RawMinds: BEING US

A Poetry Anthology
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Introduction
By Laura Ukpokolo, project participant

The Raw Minds project was an opportunity that instilled change and growth in the lives of young people in a matter of six weeks. It changed the way we thought, wrote and created. This experience gave us, young Londoners, the opportunity to receive teaching from Young People’s Poet Laureate, Theresa Lola.

Not only did we get support in improving our writing skills and exploring poetry outside of the classroom, but we also delved into topics that heavily affect young people’s lives, such as climate change, mental health, culture and identity. These topics can be compressed into the three overriding themes of the project, which were place, identity and mental health.

We were also honoured enough to have specialised people from fields of work that related to these topics come in and speak on these issues, which allowed us to have a deeper understanding through talks with a climate change expert and clinical psychologist. Furthermore, we received performance training by poet and playwright, Yomi Sode, who helped the group develop their confidence and skills on stage which supported our final performance.

However, the most standout part of the project would be the retreat at Bore House. During this time, we were able to write in the serene Kent countryside landscape, and escaped the hustle and bustle of London to just focus on our writing. We attended exciting activities, such as a baking workshop, night walks, talent shows, the most ultimate game of hide and seek, and played lots of Uno (like a LOT). Most importantly, however, we developed a stronger bond as a group and got to know and understand each other at a deeper level. Our last performance was heart-breaking as it was our final farewell; however, it was also very gratifying to see how each individual had grown in their writing, but also personally as a young person living in a difficult world. This project has given me an irreplaceable gift of being able to use poetry as an outlet and to know no matter your age, race or sexuality that your voice matters.
An interview between project participants
Malika and Laura, and Theresa Lola, Project Creative lead, and Young People’s Laureate for London 2020

What does success in poetry look like, what does it mean to be a successful poet and how have we as an ensemble demonstrated this?
The foundation of achieving success in poetry is embracing your individual voice and perspective. Though many of the prompts for the workshops were the same, the ways each individual approached this in the sessions were different, they showed their personalities, their cultural histories, their interests in language and themes, and more.

What was the project brief and what was the end goal for the project?
The poetry workshops took place over the course of six weeks, in half of the sessions poems were written directly in response to the Being Human exhibition in Wellcome Collection, the exhibition explored climate change, natural disasters and well being, and the other half of the sessions touched on other themes connected to the exhibition, such as Home, and the Future. The project was an opportunity to learn further about how poetry can be used to respond to the world around us and document how those these experiences impact our wellbeing. During the poetry sessions the groups learned the inner workings of a poem, the uses of poetry techniques such as imagery and rhythm to create more memorable poems, and also learned how to edit a poem and perform it. The Raw Minds Project ended with the group performing their poems to an audience.

Why is it important to put yourself and your experiences into the poetry you write?
Poetry is a way of seeing the world and expressing our view of the world, it's important to include our own experiences because it enriches our poems and allows the poem to be a safe heaven for our voices to be heard.

If poetry was a cake, what ingredients would you be and how much would you put in?
Poetry would be banana cake, some parts chewy and some parts tough, some parts sugary and some parts healthy.

How did you encourage the collective to overcome any obstacles such as writers block or lack of enthusiasm?
Writer’s block is often a block for a particular poem or idea, exploring something new can be helpful. Each of the sessions began with a free write which is where the collective were encouraged to write without thinking or explore a word or sentence, if during the workshops anyone experienced writer’s block or lack of enthusiasm they were either encouraged to either return to their free write or to change their approach to the writing prompt to one they found more interesting.

What were our strengths as a group?
Everyone in the group was adventurous and really welcoming of new ideas about poetry and the ways it can be used to respond to the world.

Of all the topics we used as inspiration, such as natural disaster and mental health, what do you think resonated with us the most?
I think the group resonated most with the session on Home and Places, the poems written in that session touched on belonging, migration, gentrification, wellbeing and other varied issues.

Why are these topics relevant?
The topics addressed in the poetry workshops; mental health, climate change, natural disaster, home and place, and more, are important because they are a part of the world we live in and they affect us either directly or indirectly, they define the lives of people which makes it relevant when writing about the world we live in.

During the residential, what writing skills do you believe the group practiced or developed in their writing?
The groups learned approaches to writing poems in response to photographs or art works, they learned in more detail the uses of poetry techniques, and also ways of experimenting with the form of a poem.

How much of the project did you plan or anticipate and how much spontaneity is needed for ‘good’ poetry?
The project, contents, order, poems and activities were all planned, but whenever there were poems the groups felt more connected to I extended the discussions of those poems and generated more activities around it.

If the group was a.... shape, a colour, a festival, an amusement, a movie... what would they be?
Poetry would be an amusement park with different kinds of rides to try out depending on how you are feeling that day.
People think you’re dodgy.
I think you’re dodgy.
But I also think you’re oddly arresting.

Your bright graffiti against dull pavement,
Doctor Marten boots and vegan leather jackets.
I think you’re a place of wonderous culture,
bubbling cauldron of pink punk witchiness –

Motorbikes zip along your roads
and your green patches offer a piece of peace.
You gave me Christ Church Primary School to make friends in –
NW1 or NW3?
Red uniforms, blue uniforms, green and yellow,
stripes and checks, polos and jumpers –

You’re busy, bustling, bouncy bright,
so much so that I can forget my heavy secrets.
I don’t see a hastily stitched-up childhood in you.
I see scuffed knees, worms in buckets, scary neighbours,
and stupid rumours.

You’re beautiful, and you’re a part of me.
Your friendly pubs and polluted air run through my veins,
and I’ll never be ashamed of it.
You are still my home.
Cod Spike the Librarian
Zac Leach

The sleeping metallic man sleeps.
His dark, coppery cannon casing head rusting quietly.
It is a perfect job for him though, robotically dusting on the spines of each book and then drooling in his hammock once again.

No socialising, just... Serenity.

No one comes here anyways, to read the beautifully bound books, except when the niece arrives, awaiting her inspective tours.
Happiness is
The caress of a summer breeze,
Lifting laughs layered into the wind
Envelop you in a treasured embrace.
The icy cold rakes your door with frost. And yet
You revel in kisses of sunlight

Then, sadness rolls over
An aching weighty, clawing force
It threatens to overwhelm you,
Yet it would not catch you if you fell
Tears are spat sideways, in heavy globs of rain

Anger rages as a hurricane
Limbs thrown with the strength of a storm.
Contempt strikes fires in booming flashes.
Swift and swirling chaos, a mad and meaningless malice
Passing just as quickly as it came.

Indifference.
You float uncomfortably in the frozen flood.
Quiet. Yet the world swirls loud around you.
You reach out to touch. It smears like a painting.
The swarming blur seems endlessly distant.
Noise is muted, drowned by silence.

Excitement throws you from your stupor
Thoughts crawl from hiding, cautious and careful
The myriad mix of patterns paints the sky with light
The sun bursts through cloud, blazing, impatient
Rendering the world around you in striking clarity
You stare, itching to bask in the radiance

Slowly, somewhere, the storm starts again.
Anxiety
Jane Naa Lamle Mills

It ties to the strings of your heart,
Like a pendulum,
Side to side it batters your fragile organs,
It presses against your lungs,
And grips your throat,
It struggles violently through the walls of your intestines,
They twist and turn and yell,
You step onto the stage and you're immediately
drenched in a pool of worries,
Your bones shiver in response and your fragile and
brittle body shatters,
into thousands of tiny white fragments.
Dear Photograph Oblivion
Tanisha Vakharia

Discordant smattering of leaves ringing out their dull, lull story,
Roughly chopped rock spattering stone, smattering grey spots,
Unwavering flood, bouquet of waves at once fluid and strong sit
Simmering under the flowing ombre, the
Delicate embrace of grey smoke, blue sky.
Here’s hell reaching high
Wafting, through undisturbed time
Frozen, in the sweet light of
Distance.
Dear photographed oblivion,
I, on the other side, I ask as I wonder
How that tragic chorus in the gale sings; replacing the nightingale
It rings.
I, on the other side, I ask as I wonder
How deep is your sigh?
To my ancestors, my line of grandmothers
Tell me, what makes a strong woman?
You were taught to be seen and not heard
Education was differed Freedom of Choice
was this thing unheard of

To be a teenage girl and to dream is to rebel
Be it a rapper, a builder, be it head girl
Tie your hair back
Grip on the pencil
Grab the rubber
You made a mistake
they perceive this in a sexualised way The friction will persist on
Although you are younger, your hunger to dream is abundant
Woman around the world are going redundant, rape is the new hug,
patriarchy an old drug Misused, abused, neglected What does it mean
to be a strong woman and dream?

To be a woman and achieve a dream is to Show up
Woman up Don’t forget to Throw up when a grown man
winds down his window at you Glow up Don’t shut up when
it’s your time To speak up In the workplace At home On the
phone You may get angry And when they tell you to watch
your tone Remind them it’s a woman that they came from

I am a strong woman and I am dreaming I grit my teeth
at the stitching between the gender pay gap In fact, its
enough to make me swerve tax
Watch its tear the seams, it seems to me like there are teams of women
fighting for these dreams But there are regimes where men are Loud
In our moans and Silent in our screams, silent in our dreams

To my daughter When you are living in my belly I will speak to you as if you
have already changed the world and When I unveil you The
orchestra will dance The dancers will sing The loud will cry And the sad will
smile And I’ll paint your room blue Blue for glow in the dark stars on my
baby girls sky Blue for every time I make my baby girl cry Blue for I’m sorry
Blue for its going to rain, you forgot your brolly! Blue because not all girls
like pink Blue because maybe somewhere I made you think.

To my daughter I will give you a reason to persevere even when
you have none You may have a child, but No man will tell you
when to make one And you WILL become A woman who
achieves the unachievable, nothing mediocre like a game of
poker, they will dismiss it if you don’t know what It is that you
want to do How you’ll make your mark Rosa parks Nemo, in a
sea full of sharks Lela simone Takes the weight lifting throne
Nakita I wish you could have seen her Serena williams Made
billions of women’s rights initiatives Anne frank We must
thank, her nobility never shrank Susan sandover The handover
of freedom to a country Oprah winfrey A woman that’s been free

Marilyn Monroe Will
disrupt this flow.

But you?
What does your dream look
like?

To men and women Be strong, Be educated Be opinionated, And remember
you will never be appreciated and respected by those who don’t deserve
your presence
My ancestors mortar and pestle, my ancestors make babies
Identity
Atlanta Sonson-Chapman

They’re telling me to wear feminine clothes but all I want to do is hang out with my bros
Keeping this flow unattended
Keeping my woes from corrupting my head
Like the things I believe in
Can’t believe I’m almost 18
Need to start stacking dem p’s
Get below my knees
As you see me walking with so much self esteem
Lacking the judgement of others
But wondering why I can’t get along with others
So called fathers who believe they’re the best
But be reheating themselves as if they enjoy the repent
Can’t control my left and rights
I have rights
We all have rights but don’t let them
See... You aren’t alright ...
Yo I’m still not opening that letter
I’m scared I’ll fail my gcse’s
But look at me so pleased
Dyslexia forgotten to feed me
Got all fives on my gcse’s
I pleaded to be
I need a lead or I need to make that lead
Stop trying to control my self esteem
With carrots of temptation
I’ve been in this situation
So you two get ready for your separation
Your poisonous atmosphere is very contagious

I’m so moltious
Circling through your snake like intentions
Making sure your hate don’t infect us
Can’t protect us
From this world of sex and greed
So golden
What do you need?
Stop licking their feet
As if it’s discreet
Can’t contain my pleaed

To bring back my joyful glee
Go suck your mum and leave
You just broke my trust
Which you would definitely need
It’s always the good people
Who get treated like pebbles
Kick us and throw us
But it will take a lot to break us
The person we call god
Didn’t make us to break us
But I have a question
How did he make us
Loneliness, depression, anxiety,
Something that when we feel we can’t help but retreat,
We retreat into our safe space but what’s that meant to be,
When nothing feels like home anymore and luscious green fields don’t feel like places
to be free?
Loneliness; everyone experiences and catches it as a collective,
But what is the difference between not being loved, and being around people that
make you feel unloved?
I am but a man; standing in front of you my art, no sorry not only my art, my whole
heart - it’s where it comes from, I’m not too tough ’cause really I’m torn apart,
I realised long ago that was just a facade,
A bravado act of bravery, soul searching for God,
Loneliness is lost, lost in a madness, between people that claim they love you but have
no actions there to back it,
It feels like I’m being stabbed in the back, my heart consistently shattered, and
continues to be,
The load I carry on my back paying my contingency fee,
Regardless if friendships work out for the better or worse there is no in between,
If I’m speaking honestly and wholeheartedly, I bleed what I believe,
The seed I sow is the oxygen I breathe,
My negative experiences in life are what feeds my mental health; it’s what I need to
survive, these things are just parts of me!
Let this be a letter to my loneliness, my depression and my anxiety.
You do not define me, so I do not care what you feed,
I welcome you with open arms and hope together we can just be, in peace... and we
can learn to love ourselves so to begin to be free.
Good times, no love lost, Just memories remembered in faded pictures.
The subjects and models of which Whisper sweet nothings Through photographic lips,
Eating snacks of knowledge Each image slice A fragment of our history.
What are books but descriptions Forcing minds into formations Forming words into pictures
Put down my book Distracted by my desk lamp Looking at my photos Wonder about my framing Fragments of spirit Trapped in digital purgatory,
Till the album is uncovered By a young buck Pride in his luck He twists through album pages Searching through days he never saw, Looking through the faces of dozens he never met.
Photographers are keen things. Scanning images Attempting constantly at learning. Eyes like wolves in a library Constantly searching for meaning With claws for hands You miss the point and shred the truth. Is humanity ready to Comprehend why life looks So beautiful through a grid.
I have devoted myself To living in the moment Because once these days end. Memories are more interactive than photos.
My Mirror’s Secret
Abdur Razzaque Miah

“Through the dull mirror I stare into Her eyes,”
Painted face, pink bow, glossed lips; He stares back.
A fake image, a deception, a lie.
For despite Her pretty face, a ‘She’ He’d forever lack.

A God-forsaken freak, through and through,
A chimera clothed in lies of culture,
“Don’t let them; please they can’t; they can’t see you.”
For rejection, hate, suffering loom over.

“Through the clear glass I gaze into Her eyes,
You’re a singer, artist, teacher-to-be,
Dashing Adonis, in short skirts, heels high,
You’re the most wonderful woman I see!”

Through shattered glass, He looks her in the eyes
She’s a perfect woman, yet He still cries.
A One Sided Conversation With Myself

Abigail Edu

Future me
I hope you’re doing well
I hope we’re out of our shell
I hope we’ve found a way to excel
In life.

Has our brother let go of the knife?
Does he have a wife?
Is his mentality still clouded by the idea that
family will never do him right?
Sorry for bombarding you with questions.

If I could touch him now,
I’d attack him with a hug to soothe his aggression
If I could see him now,
I’d reassure him of the sibling love that’d erase all his bad intentions
But I can’t.
As small, weak, and feeble as I am
I leave his rehabilitation to you.

You’re older, stronger, and wiser
I’m sure you can aid him on his journey
to becoming a good example of a man

How are our babies?
I know we have seven by now
I know they’re all angels by now
Do they fill our heart with glee
As you look in their eyes and realise
‘O! They’re half of me’?
I Am
Imran Ahmed

I am
a black british male
studying to get high grades
even if no one believed in me
coming home from school
making up poems that just flow with my mood
trying to forget about the news.

I am
a student boy
living in a world
just like everyone else
praying to god
asking for some miracle’s
hoping I can wake up
to see my own business,

I am
a black boy
that just wants to see
my parents smile the day i graduate,
Then I’ll know my time wasn’t wasted

I am
a believer, fighter, friendly innocent black boy
writing out my melody
hoping that school ends quick
I AM.
Birthing An Immigrant
Laura Ukpokolo

My immigrant mother gave birth not to a child but to a dream.
A dream where her labour would not have to continue in her cleaning of office toilets
A dream that would give her freedom in a society that would never love her but see her only as
a free slave
In hope that one day that dream would grow up to work in one of those offices that she once
cleaned
But now,
no matter how much baby tried to stay alive against the contractions of life she stopped breathing
That girl who is me.
Felt failed by the very society that seemed to offer so much life
A hostile society, which her torn hands had helped to build in its infancy
A society that now spat back at her like an ungrateful child who refused to eat
A society that never cared to stop and search for justice
Then came what is
The windrush generation
A failed nation
Every year a
Mis
Carriage
Of
justice
A birth that never made it to its last trimester
Instead of doctors we were given spin doctors
So we could die in the barren womb that we call an institution
A black baby turned into a sacrificial lamb for the sake of western society
A black boy stabbed to death now lies in a casket still in fetal position
Police sirens like lullabies drag us to sleep- a political narcolepsy.
A dream that never lived long enough to be called a reality.

When an immigrant child is born
our only hope is to give back to the motherland that birthed us.
To My Future Self
Tallulah Cox

To my future self

Where to even start? 
I remember a freckle faced me that had all these ideas of who she could be
My sunlit youth lens had not yet been stained by the dark realisation that no one lives forever
My curiosity filled head
Was busy cramming information in wherever it could
I did not yet wonder
Why am I here?
What am I here for?
Do I even matter?
Now when I think about the future
I wonder if you’ll even be able to read this
Will paper be an unknown entity
Will we have been taken over by technology?
In all honesty
I have no idea what to say
To a version of me that does not yet exist
To someone that will have experiences I can’t even imagine
I have no way of knowing what will happen
Facing a world so unsure
Facing a climate that is collapsing
A sixth mass extinction
Facing the rising chokehold of capitalism
All I can say is
I hope you’re happy

The patriarchal structure
and misogynistic mould
You’re told to fit into
Will try to tell you what to do
With your body
I hope you only have kids once you’re ready
Don’t get me wrong

A fully formed human full of sunshine and wishes
Half of me
Half of someone that’s an answer I’ve been missing
Would be precious beyond words
But you see
I haven’t had many positive male role models
As you well know
I hope we’ve found some of those
So trusting a man
With a piece of me
Making a person that is literally half of me
Is terrifying
I hope your gender is no longer told
It’s your fault
Don’t drink
You’re too fat
You’re too thin
No longer told not to be weak
Not to be soft
But also not to be too tough
No longer told through your very existence as a woman that you will
never be enough
I don’t want you to ‘be a lady’
I just hope you’re happy
I hope we’ve found where we can exist
And simply be
I hope you’ve found peace
I hope we’ve learnt and grown and loved and kissed
I hope we’ve travelled and explored
Always loved
I hope we’ve lived
I hope you’re sitting there reading this
With mum nearby
Always there when you need to come home
I hope your beautiful baby sister is no longer crying
I hope we help her
I hope she helps herself
If you've found that person who makes you look forward to life
Or fills your shadowed cracks with starlight
Hold on
If you have little ones
I hope we raise them with kindness

Whatever direction our life has taken
Whatever doors we’ve opened
Whatever paths we’ve traced on this cracked map of our body
Whatever paths we’ve taken with these searching feet
Wherever we are
Whoever we are

Above all hopes for the world
For society
For your love
Or for your family

Please,
I just hope you’re happy.
Credits for RawMinds Creative Writing and Poetry project

**Project Creative Lead:**
Theresa Lola

Theresa Lola is Young People’s Laureate for London 2020. The Young People’s Laureate for London programme is run by literature development agency Spread the Word.

Project Participants and poets: Nana Quarshie, Zac Leach, Imran Ahmed, Shireen Deshmukh, Jordan Minga, Malika Sandover, Martyna Zajma, Alicja Skorupa, Abdur Razzaque Miah, Tanisha Vakharia, Tallulah Cox, Jane Naa Lamle Mills, Abigail Edu, Fawaz Sajid, Atlanta Sonson-Chapman, Laura Ukpokolo.

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**Anthology**

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