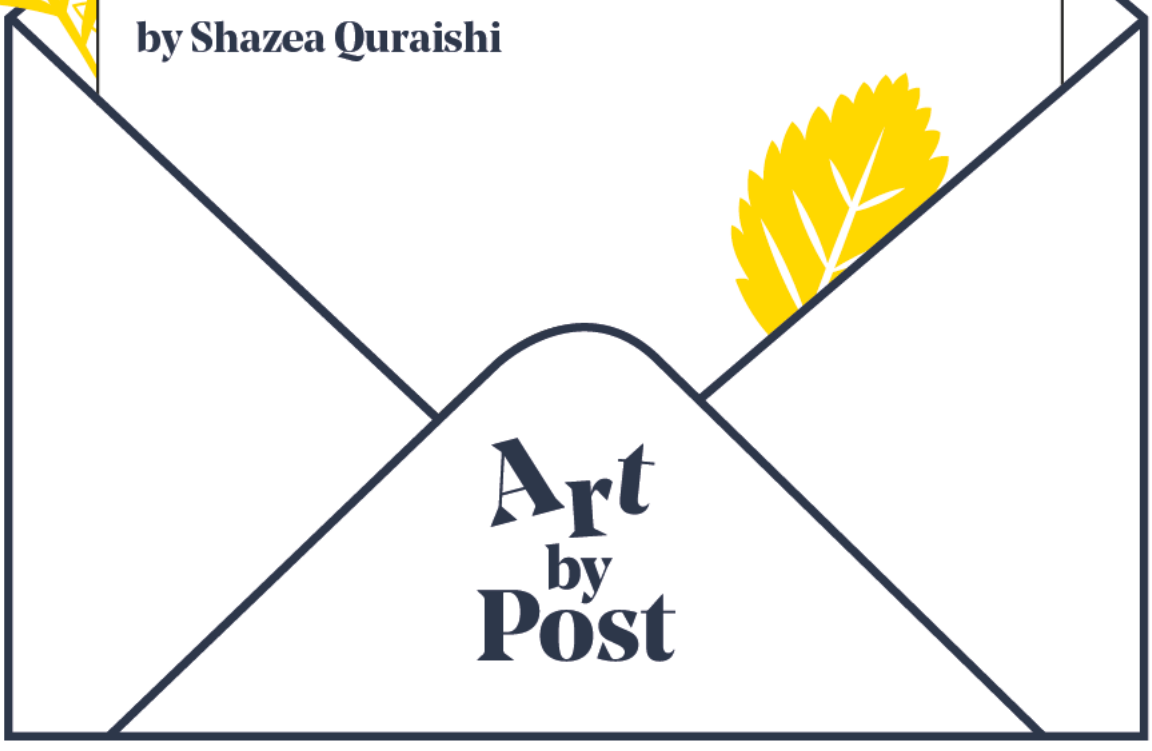
SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Creative Writing Activity Pack

Still Light

You picture your mother as a tree
- somehow that makes it easier -
a silver birch, undressing
unhurriedly, as though days were years,
while a fine rain plays
like jazz in her hair. She drops
her fine, white leaves
one by one. Her branches
are almost bare now. See
how beautiful she is against the darkening sky.

by Shazea Quraishi



LOTTERY FUNDED
Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

Welcome to Art by Post, a way for us to stay connected and creative when we're not able to meet face to face.

Over the next few months, artists will guide you through poetry and visual arts activities inspired by our art collection and artistic programme via these free booklets. We hope taking part will spark your imagination, keep your mind active and help you stay connected to others. If you would like to share your ideas and responses with us, we would love to hear from you – details of how you can get in touch are at the bottom of this page.

This booklet's guest artist is Shazea Quraishi. She's a Pakistani-born Canadian poet and translator. You can often find her writing and reading in the National Poetry Library here at the Southbank Centre.

'I wrote the poem on the front of this booklet to describe my feelings about my mother growing older. In a phone call with my mother some years ago, she told me she was going to stop dying her hair, which used to be the colour of espresso. It saddened me to think that grey hair would make my youthful mother look old, but I wanted to embrace her transformation because change is inevitable, after all.'

'I decided to think about the change in a different way by imagining my mother as a tree. The silver birch is one of my favourites. When we next met, I laughed out loud when I saw that my mother's hair was not grey but silver, just as I'd imagined, and she looked more beautiful than ever.'

Share your ideas with us

We'd love to see what you come up with.

Once we reopen our venues, we hope to create an exhibition of your work. If you'd like to send us a copy of what you've created, make sure it will fit in the A4-size Freepost envelope included in this pack. Or email your work to: artbypost@southbankcentre.co.uk

Along with your poem, please include your name on the yellow slip provided.

If you are shielding (staying at home in order to keep yourself safe from the virus) please arrange for somebody else to post your work to us, or give us a phone call. Let us know what you thought of our first booklet by email or phone.
Here's our number:

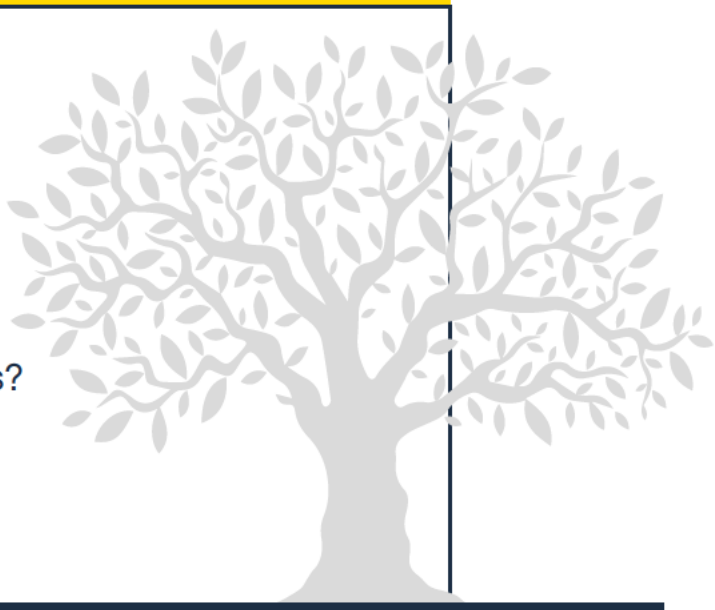
Southbank Creative Creative Learning Team: 0207 960 4206

Being a writer involves using your imagination and observation. Find yourself some paper and your favourite pen to write with and let's begin:

1

At this time of national lockdown, when we are all more confined than ever, let's take our imagination outside.

Imagine you are a tree.



What shape is your trunk?

What do your leaves look like?

Do you bear blossoms or fruit?

Are you a home for birds or insects?

What are you aware of in your surroundings?

What is the weather like?

Use the following prompts to begin writing.
Add as much detail as you can imagine:

I live...

In my branches...

I am a home for...

Around me...

Example:

I live at the end of a long garden,
with a river at my feet.
Ants run along my silver branches and a
blackbird nests on my shoulders...

2

**Trees are among the oldest living things on earth.
For example, the red cedar in Alaska can live up to 3,000 years.**

Turn your attention to a tree near your home, perhaps one you can see from your window.

What might it have seen over time? What might it have heard?

What has changed and what has stayed the same?

The tree has seen... The tree has heard ...

TIP Specific details are key to writing well: 'a salmon-pink peony, the size of an orange' is more vivid than 'a pink flower'.

Turn over for more exercises

3 Continuing now from the perspective of your tree, what do you think it is thinking about during these exceptional times we are living in?

Write a list.

Begin each line with the words: 'Now the streets are quiet, I... '

Example:

Now the streets are quiet – I listen for the sound of footsteps
I long for people to stop to admire me
I long for the boy at number 26 to lean his bicycle against my trunk

4 The poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge described prose as 'words in their best order' and poetry as 'the best words in their best order'.

Look back at the notes that make up your first draft of your poem.

Read the poem out loud. How does it flow?

Can you add anything, or take anything away, to improve the poem?

Does it sound like 'the best words in their best order'?

TIP Most poets writing today don't use regular rhyme, but they pay close

Thank you for taking part. Why not share what you've created today with somebody else? Give someone a call to read them your writing. Use your envelope to send us your writing, or call us and read it to us.

Useful numbers:

Southbank Creative Learning: 0207 960 4206
Leave us a message and we will reply as soon as possible. But please forgive us for taking a little longer to get back to you at the moment.

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65
For practical information and advice. Free to call.

Silver Line: 0800 470 80 90 Open 24 hours a day. Free to call.

Alzheimer's Society Dementia Connect: 0333 150 3456
Get in touch if you, or people you care for, are worried about coronavirus and need some support and advice.

You'll receive your next booklet in a couple of weeks so please look out for it.