

# SOUTHBANK CENTRE

## 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**

**Art  
by  
Post**

**Poems for  
Our Planet**



National  
Academy  
for Social  
Prescribing



**Welcome to Art by Post: Poems for Our Planet. This is an opportunity to use creativity and nature to inspire you and support your wellbeing. Together, we'll take part in creative activities which invite us to connect with the living world around us, and explore opportunities to better care for our planet.**

Getting closer to nature can help us to be happier and feel that our lives are more worthwhile, therefore improving our wellbeing. *The Nature Connection Handbook*, published by the University of Derby, identifies five pathways that can help us grow our connection to nature – we'll highlight some of these throughout this booklet.



**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 dyeing 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.'

**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**

With the winter solstice behind us, each day is a little longer and more filled with light. Let's welcome spring and take our imagination outside. You might like to take a walk outside to inspire you, look out of the window or recall a park or some woods you know well. *Shirin yoku* – forest bathing – is the Japanese practice of being calm and quiet among trees. Spending time in nature, paying close attention to the sights and smells and slowing down while breathing deeply can help to de-stress and enhance wellbeing. Try it!

### **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...*

*I feel...*



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. Red cedars in Alaska can live for 3,000 years, and horse chestnut trees (the ones with conkers) can live for up to 300 years! In many ways they are our ancestors.

## 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? Try finishing these sentences, adding as much detail as you can:

*The tree has seen...*

*The tree has heard...*

*The tree has witnessed...*

*The tree has held...*

TIP

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



3

Continuing now from the perspective of your tree, what are the changes it might have noticed recently about the times we are living in? Celebrating and sharing nature's events and stories, like the changes of the seasons, is one of the pathways to nature connection.

## Write a list.

Complete each line written below:

*Today, with my arms reaching to the sky, I see...*

*With my branches extended, I feel...*

*Rooted here, I sense...*

*Rooted here, I notice...*



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 you have written in Activity 3 out loud. How does it flow? Can you add anything from Activities 1 and 2, or take anything away, to improve the poem?

Once you have written out your finished poem, you could try drawing your tree alongside it or even write the words in the shape of a tree. Try to be playful and see where your imagination takes you!

TIP

Most poets writing today don’t use regular rhyme, but they pay close attention to sound and rhythm.

This poem was written by Kevin Fitzgerald. Kevin works for Grounded EcoTherapy as a gardener on the Queen Elizabeth Hall Roof Garden at Southbank Centre and wrote this poem about the nature which exists there.

### In My Eden

By Kevin Fitzgerald

The soils now nurse the newly born,  
as greens weave into the lawn.

Waters dive to greet the root,  
to cut the ways that pump the fruit.

And insects kick at their shells,  
as sleeping seeds turn in the dark.

Winters white sorrows hang in shreds,  
like the sheets of lovers’ beds.

For the spring is pulsing deep in the gears,  
to drive the tips of tender spears.

The sun sheds and peels,  
soft winds seek out skin to feel.

The coming triumph of the flowers,  
The stretching muscle of the wood.



Simply noticing the good things in nature each day for a week brings sustained and clinically significant improvements in mental health. There is now a solid body of evidence that having a strong sense of connection to nature helps people feel good and function well. To find out more, see the *Nature Connection Handbook* (<http://bit.ly/NatureConnectionHandbook>).

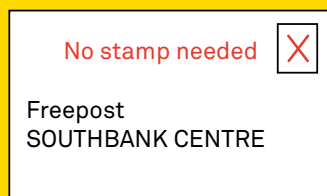
## Thank you for taking part.

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.

## We'd love to hear from you!

The Southbank Centre is the UK's largest arts centre, and this summer we're presenting a season of events, performances and an exhibition about our planet and climate change. We'll be including some *Poems for Our Planet* poetry sent to us by our participants as part of this.

If you would like to send us poetry and artwork you've created through the activities in this booklet, you can email [artbypost@southbankcentre.co.uk](mailto:artbypost@southbankcentre.co.uk), use the envelope provided or address an envelope to **Freepost SOUTHBANK CENTRE**. Please write your name on the back.



If you can't send us your work by post or email, please arrange for somebody else to send your work to us, or you can tell us about your artwork by phone on **020 7960 4206**.

You're welcome to get in touch to let us know what you think of this booklet, ask questions, give feedback or opt out of the project at any time.

## Contact us

By phone: **020 7960 4206**

By email: [artbypost@southbankcentre.co.uk](mailto:artbypost@southbankcentre.co.uk)

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