

ARTSDROP #7

GUEST ARTIST: **Shazea Quraishi**TITLE: **Perspectives and Personification**

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.

Shazea says: 'I wrote this poem to describe my feelings about my mother growing older and her hair growing more silver and gray. It

saddened me to think of her looking "old", so I decided to think about the change in a different way, and it helped me to imagine her as a tree. The silver birch is one of my favourites so when her hair turned silver, she looked more beautiful than ever.'



## 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.

Shazea Quraishi

**Just like trees, people grow and change as they get older. How is this process explored in the poem? Being a writer involves using your imagination and observation. By using figurative language, you can give life to your ideas by adopting the perspective of somebody else, or something else.**

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## Let's look at language

**Figurative language** is a term to describe words and ideas that suggest meanings and help create a vivid mental image for the reader. Shazea uses lots of different examples of figurative language in her poem to explain how the tree is like her mother.

### Examples of figurative language:

**Metaphors** are ideas used to represent or symbolise something else.

In the poem, the seasonal cycle of the tree is a **metaphor** to describe how humans mature and age. '*She drops her fine, white leaves, one by one*' refers to the tree entering the 'winter' of its life. Everyone changes as they grow older.




**Similes** are used to compare things to each other, to give a stronger image of what they are like, most often using the words 'like' or 'as'. '*Fine rain plays like jazz in her hair*' describes the way the raindrops are dancing around the tree's thinner branches ('hair') in the way that jazz music has a melody.

**Personification** is giving human feelings and actions to objects or ideas.

'*undressing unhurriedly*' describes the way the tree is slowly shedding its autumn leaves. The tree obviously doesn't wear clothes itself but the poet brings the tree's action to life by associating it with something people do.

## Learning links

National Curriculum themes explored in these activities:

-  Writing creatively from a variety of viewpoints
-  Understanding use, and effect of, figurative language
-  Developing initial ideas and evaluating the effectiveness of own writing

English

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## A new perspective

Imagine now that you are an old tree. Think about what you look like.

What shape is your trunk? What colour are your leaves? Do you bear blossoms or fruit? Are you a home for birds or insects? Are you starting to feel creaky, or still standing tall?

Think about where you might be planted. Do you like your surroundings? What is the weather like?

Use the following prompts to begin composing some sentences. Add as much detail as you can come up with:

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. My trunk is twisted and gnarled like old rope, but I still brim with new buds each spring.

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## Feed your ideas more figurative language

Think more about the perspective of your tree. What do you think it is thinking about during these exceptional times we are living in?

This is a great chance to use personification. Describe the emotions your tree might be feeling and what it may be noticing in the world around it.

**Example:** Now the streets are quiet. I listen for the sound of footsteps. I long for people to stop to admire me. I even wish the boy at number 26 would lean his bicycle against my trunk again. I am lonely, but hopeful the hustle and bustle of the road will return when I feel the sun on my leaves once more.

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## Compose, publish and reflect

Look back at your ideas. Can you use the sentences or phrases you have created to compose a piece of creative writing to publish for your friends, family or teacher?

It could be a short poem or a diary entry in which the voice is the perspective of the tree you have been personifying. It might help to write out your favourite phrases (out of the writing you have already produced) on separate strips of paper so you can play around with their order until you are happy with the flow of your writing.

The poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge described prose as 'words in their best order' and poetry as 'the best words in their best order'. Read your work out loud as you go to help you decide whether you need to switch, add or take anything away to improve your work.

'Publish' your finished piece of writing and draw an illustration of the tree you have been imagining as you have composed your work. You could walk around your local area to see if you can find a tree that is similar to what you imagined and photograph or draw it. You can then place your drawing and a nicely written version of your poem in a special place to admire and share with your friends, family or teachers.

**Did you have a particular person in mind when you were thinking about your tree, just like Shazea did?**

**Thank you for taking part. You might want to share your work with your school, friends and family, or even our team at Southbank Centre on social media:**  
**#ArtsDropSC**  
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