



RUNAWAYS LONDON

**TEACHING RESOURCES
KEY STAGE 3/4**



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INTRODUCTION

Between the 1650s and 1780s many hundreds of enslaved people were brought to London. Most were African although a significant minority were South Asian and a smaller number were indigenous American.

While enslaved in the capital some attempted to escape and, on occasions, those who pursued them placed advertisements in London newspapers seeking the capture and return of these freedom-seekers.

The Runaways London project has commissioned five poets and two artists to respond to these historical advertisements and create new poems and artworks which investigate the lives, stories and histories excluded from the advertisements.

These resources by the participating poets and artists take your class through their creative processes to produce poems and artworks responding to this theme.

The Runaways London anthology containing all commissioned poems and artworks, and a short film about the project can be found at: spreadtheword.org.uk/runaways

ABOUT RUNAWAYS LONDON

Runaways London is an arts heritage programme which engages with archival evidence of enslaved Londoners of the 17th and 18th Century, who escaped their enslavement to find new lives in the City.

Working with research by University of Glasgow's Runaway Slaves in Britain project (runaways.glasgow.ac.uk), a team of young poets and artists of African and South Asian heritage developed a series of poems and artworks responding to so called 'runaway slave' advertisements published in London newspapers between the 1650s and 1780s.

Working on the project are poets: Momtaza Mehri, Gboyega Odubanjo, Abena Essah, Memoona Zahid and Oluwaseun Olayiwola and artists: Olivia Twist and Tasia Graham. Runaways London is managed by Spread the Word and the project publisher is Ink Sweat & Tears Press.

RESEARCHING THE LIVES OF ENSLAVED LONDONERS

Who inhabited 17th and 18th century London? Kings, courtiers and a few of the city's more affluent citizens have left us portraits of themselves and their families, and some of the buildings they constructed and the things that they owned survive, allowing us to feel the tenor of their lives. A few people like Samuel Pepys have left diaries and documentary records, while still more can be traced in court or church records. But although a few seventeenth-century Londoners speak to us through the archives most have left little or even no trace and we can imagine their lives in only the broadest and vaguest terms.

Londoners of African and South Asian origin are amongst the most invisible and silent of these historical figures, although there were a significant number in the capital. A number of them were sailors and dock workers, while a few were craftsmen, labourers and washerwomen. Most, however, were domestic servants in the households of elite and mercantile families who had spent time in or had connections with the British Empire's colonies. Some were free, a few were bound and indentured servants, but others were enslaved.

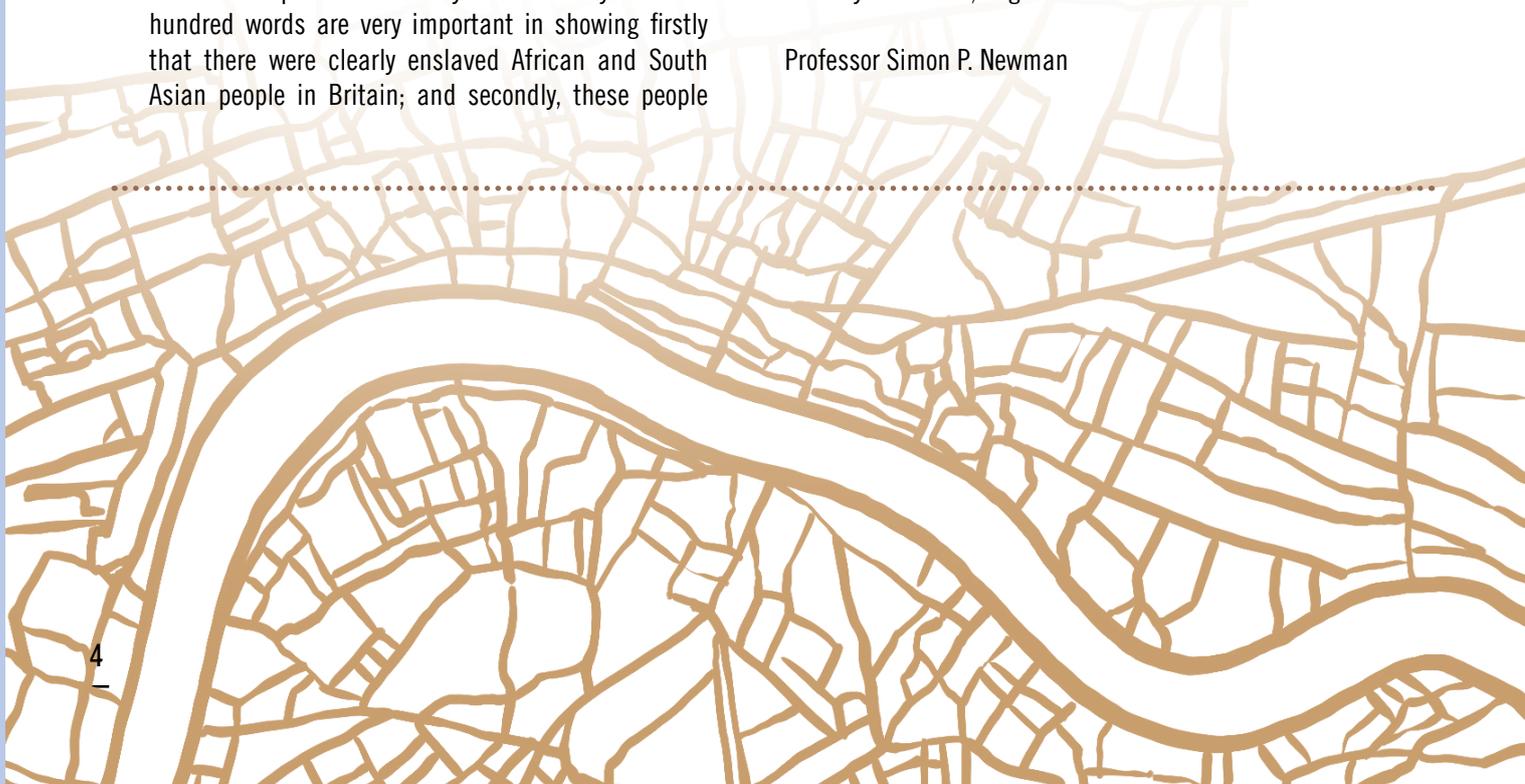
Without portraits or diaries, one of the ways we know about the existence of these enslaved Londoners is through many hundreds of short newspaper advertisements placed in newspapers by masters and enslavers who described and offered rewards for the capture and return of enslaved people who had escaped. Often called 'runaway slave' advertisements, these short pieces of usually between fifty and one hundred words are very important in showing firstly that there were clearly enslaved African and South Asian people in Britain; and secondly, these people

resisted by attempting to escape. The records also reveal that more of these advertisements appeared in London's newspapers than in those of any other city; and that the average age of these freedom-seekers was just 16 years old.

The Runaway Slaves in Britain project has located many hundreds of newspaper advertisements about enslaved escapees in the British Isles and made them accessible in an easily searchable database. In many cases these short advertisements are the only surviving record we have of a particular enslaved person, but even then they may tell us very little. Sometimes we don't even know the name of the freedom-seeker. We might learn whether they were of African or South Asian descent, how well they spoke English, the clothes they had been wearing when they escaped, and in some cases whether they were scarred by slave brands or had been forced to wear metal slave collars around their necks.

It is all that we don't know about London's freedom-seekers that encouraged us to develop this project, Runaways London. Compiling as much historical data as possible about enslaved people in London we gave this information to young poets and artists based in London and of African and South Asian heritage. We asked them to create works speaking to these archival silences; building from short runaway advertisements and developing ideas, impressions and stories about the brave Londoners, some of them little more than children, who dared to challenge their enslavers and run away into the City of London, eager to find better and freer lives.

Professor Simon P. Newman



BLACK BALLS AND SHAPED POEMS

ABENA ESSAH

WHEREAS a black Negro Woman, about nineteen Years old, with two Letters on her Breast and Shoulder, made her Escape out of the Ship Hannah, Capt. Fowler, for Jamaica, the 6th of June last, goes by the Name of Sabinah, is supposed to be deluded away by some other Blacks about Whitechapel, Rag-Fair, or Rotherhith: Whoever brings her to the late Mr. Neate's, on Lawrence-Pountney-Hill, shall have Three Guineas Reward.

— The Daily Advertiser, 14th September 1743



BLACK BALLS AND SHAPED POEMS

BY ABENA ESSAH

Exploring the history of Black balls using free writes to create visual or shaped poems



- Explore the history of Black balls and how freedom-seekers thrived and built communities
- Discuss and write about themes of Black balls, escape routes, heritage, music, community
- Use free writes to generate creative material
- Think about the shape of a poem and what that shape communicates
- Draft and write a new poem

'BRA FIE' AND BLACK BALLS

Begin by reading the poem 'Bra Fie' below. Ask the class: how did you feel about the poem? What did you think the poem was about? Who, where and what did you notice in the poem?

Then read the newspaper excerpt about Black balls below. Although not particularly well known about today, Black-owned taverns operated at the time and Black-only social events like the one described were held by and for the Black community. As well as the event described here, another is recorded as being a ball for nearly 200 people which took place in a pub in Westminster.

Ask the class to think about how these black balls might function as spaces for the Black population to find community and joy. Discuss why this might have been important for enslaved Londoners.

FREE WRITES

A free write is an activity where you write continuously for a set period of time to release a stream of ideas. Free writing is done off the top of your head in response to a writing prompt, without thinking too much about technique or form. It can be a useful technique for preventing your inner critic from stopping you putting pen to paper. The only aim is to keep writing continuously.

When facilitating a free write, you can give students a starter sentence for them to complete. This can help them begin writing.

As they are writing you can also gradually deliver prompts to aid students with fresh ideas or things to explore. Sentence starters and writing prompt examples can be found in the activity descriptions for each free write. If students are stuck at any point, they can simply repeat their previous word or sentence until fresh inspiration hits; but they mustn't stop writing.

FREE WRITE 1

Ask the class to imagine they are someone attending one of the Black balls and to write from their perspective. Set them writing for about 4–5 minutes. Remind them this is not about producing perfect writing, but about generating lots of ideas.

Sentence starters:

I can hear the sound of...
The sound of... is floating through the air...
In the middle of the room there is...
My body can feel...
People are...
The smell of...

Writing prompts:

What can you hear, see, taste and smell?
Is there food there?
Is there a band, if so, what does the band look like?
What instruments are they playing?

Once you have brought the free write to a close, remind them that this writing is to generate their own ideas, and they don't need to share anything if they don't want to. However, if anyone is willing, invite them to share any of their ideas or sentences they particularly like with the class.



FREE WRITE 2

In every story or poem there is a turning point. Either something exciting that happens or a conflict that needs resolving; something that changes the narrative arc of a poem or story.

In 'Bra Fie' the turning point that interrupts the description of a Black ball is Sabinah remembering how she was captured on the Slave Ship and escaped. Sabinah is based on a real enslaved Londoner who escaped.

Read the newspaper advertisements seeking Sabinah's recapture. They describe how Sabinah is 'deluded away by some blacks' — in other words helped by her community to escape.

Use another 5-minute free write to help develop more ideas.

This time ask the class to imagine that their character attending the Black ball is an enslaved person who has escaped.

Ask them to think about how they escaped? If so, where were they in London when they escaped? On a ship, in a Slave Owner's House? Who came to get them, was it their friends, or perhaps someone the person in your poem had fallen in love with? And where did these people help them to run to?

Sentence starters:

I climb out of the window of master's house...
I am standing on the piers about to board...
I remember the warmth of...
My body is shuddering with...
They came to get me...



FREE WRITE 3

'Bra Fie' tells the story of Sabinah who has Ghanaian heritage (a detail I invented based on my own background) and how her community at the ball supports her through a homecoming ceremony where she is reconnected with other women and people of Ghanaian heritage. They welcome her and name her/give her back her indigenous Ghanaian name through song.

Ask the class to think about the importance of heritage/culture, family and community. What celebrations within their heritage remind them of the homecoming ceremony? It could be a church hall party, a family gathering at a religious celebration, or a barbeque with extended family with music.

Use these experiences for another 5-minute free write. Ask students to envision and describe a scene that demonstrates celebration of community and to tell the story of the freedom-seeker they are writing about.



Sentence starters:

Four women beckon me forward to dance...

We sit in a circle and sing...

Everyone closes their eyes...

An elder at the front of the hall calls my name and I...

They serve us all plates of...

They welcome me home by...

Writing prompts:

Does the freedom-seeker have an indigenous name might they reclaim at the naming and homecoming ceremony?

Is there singing, if so, what are people singing?

Is there another language your character or anyone else might be speaking or singing?

BONUS TASK

Rather than using their own culture, the class could think about and research a particular country in Africa and their culture. They could use their research to guide their free write above.

CREATE YOUR POEM

'Bra Fie' is written in a circle to represent the people sitting around the whole room, a sense of community and the shape of the dancefloor.

In pairs ask the class to discuss the ideas they've produced in their free writes and think about what shape their finished poem could be.



Could the poem sway, the way people would when dancing, with the verse gradually travelling to one side of the page and travelling back to the other side of the page and so forth? What other shapes could represent movement, music, family or community? A (family) tree? A drum? A horn? Or perhaps a circle similar to 'Bra Fie'.

Ask the class to read over all three of their free writes and select their favourite lines and ideas to use to create their final poem.

They can arrange and rearrange these lines on the page, and then use them as a starting point to create a shaped poem in the style of 'Bra Fie'. It should use material from all three free writes covering the Black ball, some information about the freedom-seeker, and a celebration of their culture. The free write sentences are just a starting point and the class should feel free to add to them, or to edit and adapt what they've already written.

SHARING AND DEBRIEF

Once students have finished, ask those who would like to, to share their final poems, showing how it's presented on the page as well as reading the text. The rest of the class can pick out the elements that they find most effective.

RESOURCES

RUN away, a NEGRO BOY, about 13 years old, tall of his age, answers to the name of TOM, and speaks good English; had on when he went away, an old fustian frock, brown cloth waistcoat, dirty leather breeches, and an old flapped hat. Whoever will bring him to the Union Coffee-house, in Cornhill, shall be well rewarded for their trouble; and whoever harbours him after the publication of this advertisement, will be prosecuted as the law directs.

— Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser, 19 August 1771

BRA FIE

BY ABENA ESSAH

for Sabinah

Homecoming Ball, Rotherhithe, 18 June 1743

Song of brass horns
is rich dancing through my scalp;
he shaved my coils but they are growing. Black
hands, black hands grasping music; black eyes are
wide eyed, I rest my eyelids. Listen to the swell of thudding
drum beating, beating. We are so many, grinning teeth, tightly packed
but upright; yellow glow kissing the cheeks of everything. A man gets up to
swirl, shoulder blades bending, hands lifted - ghost of orange soil flicking at his feet.
Blood

congeals on his back, raw wounds from whipping. He keeps swirling. Red still dripping

red in my mouth.
Back cold on ship Hannah's floor
metal heaving my windpipe
brothers' limbs on top of me
feet in my mouth.

They came to get me: Shaquan, Oluwafemi, Afia. He tried to pack me away, chains again but
they gripped me with hands so warm, in cunning Navy sailor suits, telling white men on deck
'Mr Neate's request: Sabinah is needed up stream'

Goodbye death in Jamaica.

In this room we are the sun's offspring. Elder Oppong glides to the centre, dancing
scatters; he calls the names of us, fresh arrivals: 'James Asante, Anike Yahaya
Akosua Darkwah'

Akosua, the name Sunday sung for me
out the womb, I arise. Women who know the weight of me approach
speaking the language my spine was bent to forget,
resting wise palms upon my shoulders;
diaphragms swelling

Nyamæy da woase
Me Nyankopɔn yeyi woayɛ
Sɛ wode Akosua abeduru asumdwiem
Yɛnnsu bio
Emom yɛbɛ sa na yɛagye yen ani
Odomankoma yɛda woase

Densu river is streaming down my cheeks

peel in the warmth of it all

the letters on my shoulder

BLACK BALLS

‘Among the sundry fashionable routs or clubs, that are held in town, that of the Blacks or Negro servants is not the least. On Wednesday night last, no less than fifty-seven of them, men and women, supped, drank, and entertained themselves with dancing and music, consisting of violins, French horns, and other instruments, at a public-house in Fleet-street, till four in the morning. No Whites were allowed to be present, for all the performers were Blacks.’

London Chronicle, 16-18 February 1764

‘Although the white community expressed some amusement at the idea of a black social life, such a life was vibrant. If servants...were accustomed to making such arrangements for their masters, they were surely capable of making them for themselves.’

Gretchen Gerzina, *Black London: Life Before Emancipation*
(Rutgers University Press, 1995)

ADVERTS ABOUT SABINAH

‘A Black Negro Woman, about nineteen Years old, with two Letters on her Breast and Shoulder, made her Escape out of the Ship Hannah, Capt. Fowler, for Jamaica, the 6th inst. goes by the Name of Sabinah, is suppos’d to be deluded away by some other Black about Whitechapel, Rag-Fair, or Rotherhith. Whoever brings her to the late Mr. Neale’s, on Lawrence-Pountney-Hill, shall have three Guineas Reward; or if put on board the Ship again any time between this and next Tuesday, Ten Shillings more.’

Daily Advertiser (London), 17 June 1743

‘WHEREAS a black Negro Woman, about nineteen Years old, with two Letters on her Breast and Shoulder, made her Escape out of the Ship Hannah, Capt. Fowler, for Jamaica, the 6th of June last, goes by the Name of Sabinah, is supposed to be deluded away by some other Blacks about Whitechapel, Rag-Fair, or Rotherhith: Whoever brings her to the late Mr. Neate’s, on Lawrence-Pountney-Hill, shall have three Guineas Reward.’

Daily Advertiser (London), 14 September 1743



The poem uses some sentences in the Twi language:

Bra Fie: Come home

Nyame yɛda woase: God we thank you

Me Nyankopɔn yɛyi woaye: My God we praise you

Sɛ wode Akosua abeduru asumdwiem: For safely and peacefully bringing Akosua back

Yɛnsu bio: We won't cry anymore

Emom yɛbɛ sa na yɛagyɛ yen ani: Instead, we will dance and celebrate

Odomankoma yɛda woase: God almighty we thank you

ABOUT THE ARTIST: ABENA ESSAH

Abena Essah is a multidisciplinary artist based in London. Their work intertwines queer identity, Blackness, music and Ghanaian heritage. More recently, their practice has focused on excavating untold stories of Queer African ancestry and Black history. They are a BBC Words First finalist 2020, a Some-Antics Slam Champion and Roundhouse Poetry Slam finalist.

Abena Essah is also an alumnus of Obsidian and The Writing Room and has been published in the *Roundhouse Poetry Collective Alumnus Anthology*.

COLLAGE ILLUSTRATIONS

TASIA GRAHAM

Run away from her Mistress, last Saturday Morning, a young Negro Woman, about 15 Years old. She has a remarkable large Cut over each of her Cheeks, being her Country Mark in Guinea, is marked on the left Shoulder E.P. speaks English very indifferently, is short of stature, and had on when she went away, a Stuff Black and White Cross-barr'd Gown, Check'd Apron, Handkerchief and Petticoat, Red Cloak and Black Silk Hat; and stole two silver Spoons mark'd in a Cypher M G. Whoever will give Information of her, so that she may be got again, shall receive a Reward of Five Guineas, by applying at the Bar of the Jamaica Coffee-house in St. Michael's Alley, Cornhill; and if the Spoons are offered for Sale or Pawn, please to stop them and the Party, and give Notice to Sir John Fielding, and you shall receive the same Reward.

— The Public Advertiser, 6th November 1764



COLLAGE ILLUSTRATIONS BY TASIA GRAHAM

Creating a visual collage illustration of the journey of enslaved Londoners



- Discuss the forced journeys undertaken by enslaved people in 17th and 18th century London
- Sketch elements of the journey
- Collate historical and contemporary images to build a narrative
- Create visual collage illustrations evoking the journeys of enslaved people

INTRODUCTION

In the 17th and 18th centuries there were many hundreds of enslaved people living and working in London. Most were African although a significant minority were South Asian and a smaller number were indigenous American. In each case they or their parents or grandparents would have been brought to London from their homelands.

The aim of this session is to create a collage illustration looking at the journey of an enslaved Londoner.

DISCUSSION

Ask the class to put themselves in the shoes of the captured and to try and understand their lives and backgrounds. What must it have felt like to be transported to a new land with no rights?

Think about the physical environment. What is the world they were leaving behind like? What about the ship? The ocean? What were they greeted with when they arrived at the docks in London? Discuss, and ask the class to jot down notes or quick ideas.

Now make your focus narrower. What about the ship? Where did people sleep? What noises could they hear? Again jot down ideas.

Finally, make the focus as tight as possible on the enslaved people. What would their physical condition have been? What were they wearing? How are their hands? Their feet? Their shackles? Again jot down ideas.

Although referring to enslaved people transported to America rather than the UK, the American Library of Congress has freely available resources covering some of these experiences which can provide useful background research to this exercise.

loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/african/journey-in-chains/

Instead of or as well as jotting down ideas, it can help to quickly search online for images that relate to each idea, pulling these up as an image bank for the class.



FORGOTTEN JOURNEY OF THE ENSLAVED

Now look at the illustration *Forgotten journey of the enslaved* below (bit.ly/3pbyp24). What different elements can the class pick out which show the journey of these enslaved people? What do they think about the placement of the different elements? Why do they think individual parts have been placed where they have?



Ask the class to each get out a pencil and paper. They should look at the ideas and images collected in the discussion and ask themselves: 'what I am thinking about when I see these images?'

Ask them to create five drawings around this question. They can be big or small but make sure the lines are thick enough to cut around.

Give the class 15 minutes to draw, referencing the imagery you have discussed.

Afterwards, ask for volunteers to talk about their sketch. How are the images successful in revealing the journey of enslaved people?

CREATING A VISUAL COLLAGE ILLUSTRATION

The students' sketches will act as the beginnings of their designs, so ask them to carefully cut out their sketches.

Whilst the class is cutting, place large bold-coloured pieces of paper on the tables. Ask them to each select a coloured piece of paper as the base of their illustration. They should think about what feeling they want the illustration to express. Is the atmosphere gloomy, frightening? Is it claustrophobic? Use the colours to your advantage to create an atmosphere.

Have the class glue their sketches onto their chosen piece of paper. Remind them to be mindful of placement to create a story.

Now allow the class time to go off and find second imagery sources to add to their designs. (Alternatively you may want to provide images/resources to save time.)

They can take images from Google as well as magazines, newspapers, social media. They don't all have to be historical images from the 17th and 18th century. Remind the class they can interpret their design however they like, but be sure to think of the story and the context of their design as they make their selections.

As they find images, students should print and/or cut them out. They should use this time to talk to peers about their intentions, and bounce ideas off each other.

When imagery has been collected the design process can start.

Remind students that they can layer images, strategically placing content and considering the narrative behind the imagery to create a story.

Turn on some music, relax the room and let the class create!

Give the pupils roughly 30 minutes to create the illustration.



SHARING

Students should finish with a collage illustration on a coloured background, with imagery producing a narrative on a Black British enslaved person's experience.

Choose five random pieces of the work produced and have the pupils talk through their ideas.

Use this time to lead a discussion on how they felt. What did they learn? Why is this an important topic to explore?

ABOUT THE ARTIST: TASIA GRAHAM

Tasia Graham explores bold, atmospheric, narrative illustration, using her colourful palette and fluid, stylised drawing techniques.

Working in both digital format and traditional painting, Tasia explores womanhood, culture, and identity, depicting moods and scenes formed into illustrative storytelling. Tasia draws inspiration from real life experiences and people to create authentic storytelling art.

RESOURCES

RUN away, two Negro Girls, and Sisters, named Jane Gray and Maria Gray; Jane is short and well-set, with the Evil in her Neck, and now very much swelled, 18 Years of Age, and speaks good English; Maria is slender, and rather taller than the other, 16 Years of Age. Whoever will bring either of the above Negro Girls to Capt. Barrett, near Shadwell Church, or to John Fielding, Esq; shall receive one Guinea Reward for ea[c]h. They are Captain Barrett's Property, and any Person harbouring or secreting them, will be prosecuted for the same.

- Public Advertiser, 20 November 1758

FORGOTTEN JOURNEY OF THE ENSLAVED

BY TASIA GRAHAM



REIMAGINING 17TH AND 18TH CENTURY RUNAWAYS MOMTAZA MEHRI

A Negro Man named Deago, run away the 4th Instant from his Master Capt. Benjamin Stowe, Commander of the Ship Charles. Whoever secures the Negro, and gives notice to the said Captain, or to Mr. Crisp at the Carolina Coffee-house in Birch-in-lane, London, shall have 5 Guineas, and Charges.

— The London Gazette, 14th April 1701



REIMAGINING 17TH AND 18TH CENTURY RUNAWAYS BY MOMTAZA MEHRI

An investigation of poems, primary sources, creative interpretations and visual prompts to recreate the lives of runaways in 17th and 18th century London



- Discuss the experiences of enslaved Londoners, their arrival in London, their fears and freedoms
- Explore the meaning of runaways advertisements
- Create free writes based on discussions
- Investigate depictions of 17th and 18th century enslaved people
- Create mirror poems in the voice of these characters

INTRODUCTION

London's docklands has long been a hub of international trade, migration, historical and political transformation. The docklands were at the heart of the transatlantic slave trade, providing a route for the movement of goods harvested by enslaved plantation laborers in the Caribbean. For many enslaved people of African and South Asian descent during the 17th and 18th centuries, the docks would have also been the first glimpses of England.

This was an area teeming with life, full of dock workers, sailors, stowaways, traders, apprentices, artisans, and servants. At the height of the British Empire, this was one of the busiest ports in the world. London's growing Black populations were a visible part of this dynamic, ever-changing community. Such a setting would be an ideal location for a runaway to disappear into.

'BANKSIDE, BREAKING' AND 'BANKSIDE, BEFORE'



Read the poems 'Bankside, Breaking' and 'Bankside, Before' with your students. Could these poems be in conversation with each other, perhaps even sharing a protagonist? Ask the class to discuss in pairs and share their thoughts.

Share a clip from Paul Robeson's musical *Song of Freedom* (1936) (bit.ly/3oA7rAM) a film depicting the diverse makeup of docklands life.

Consider the River Thames as an entry point into an entirely new world for many of those who arrived at its banks. Discuss what it might have been like to arrive in this location for the first time.

FREE WRITING



Ask your students to use their five senses to imagine the bustling scenes of docklands life. Think of the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and sensations which must have bombarded new arrivals.

Get the class to list these as a free write, writing continuously without stopping to edit or correct so that they generate as many ideas as possible.

You can also share the following images as inspiration:

- *Imports from France* by Louis Philippe Boitard, 1757 — bit.ly/3FdN5Dz
- *May Morning* by John Collet, 1761-70 — bit.ly/3mqUNS7

RUNAWAYS

Little is known about the lives of runaways after a successful escape. What we do know is often filtered through the historical record of runaway advertisements placed in newspapers by enslavers offering rewards for the capture of these individuals.

Hundreds of such advertisements appeared in London newspapers, often alongside notices for missing livestock and everyday goods. The age, gender, height, weight, physical characteristics, languages spoken, and notable skills of a runaway were detailed, as well as any other distinctive identifies (like scars or engraved collars).

Runaways of all ages risked severe punishment if caught as well as destitution on London's streets. Some even faced the threat of being sent to the Caribbean's infamously brutal plantations by their enraged masters.

Read the following advertisement for 15-year-old Pompey, who was forced to work as a personal attendant for the wealthy merchant Mr. Stevens.



'RUN away from his Master the 14th instant, Pompey a Black Boy about 15 years of Age, he had on a sad colour'd Frock, a blue Wastcoat and blue Stockings, with a brass Collar about his neck, without Cap or Hat. Whosoever secured him and brings him to his Maser Mr. William Stevens a Merchant in East-lane on Rotherheth-Wall; or to Mr. Howard's the crown Coffee-House behind the Royal Exchange, shall have Twenty Shillings Reward.'

Daily Courant, 22 May 1703

These notices appeared alongside other advertisements, letting readers know about items for sale. As a class discuss why the prevalence of such advertisements was so normalised. Discuss the 'genre' of runaways advertisements in relation to other advertisements.

Leading on from this activity, assign the class into pairs. Refer back to the discussions about London's docks, as well as the runaways advertisements. Ask the pairs to use the questions below to extend these discussions and then feedback to the whole group:

How do you define freedom?

What is the opposite of freedom?

What do you think freedom meant to Pompey?

What freedoms do you think runaways like Pompey wanted for themselves?

Do you think the London of Pompey's time was a 'free' place to live?

FREEDOM AND FEAR



Continuing in pairs, ask students to build on the free writing exercise earlier. This time the prompts are: freedoms and fears.

From the perspective of a runaway stepping into London's streets, what awaits them? How could they melt into London's masses, especially when featured in these advertisements? What possible life could they make for themselves?

Ask one student per pair to free write a list of freedoms, whilst the other creates a list of fears.

Free write to generate ideas and then discuss as a pair, before feeding back to the class.

DEPICTIONS OF AFRICAN AND SOUTH ASIAN BRITONS



Show the class the three paintings below:

- *The Children of Edward Holden Cruttenden* by Sir Joshua Reynolds, c.1763 — bit.ly/3liZWMV
- *Elizabeth Murray, Lady Tollemache, later Countess of Dysart and Duchess of Lauderdale (1626-1698 and an Attendant* by Sir Peter Lely, c.1651 — bit.ly/2YIIIf
- *An Unknown Man, perhaps Charles Goring of Wiston (1744-1829), out Shooting with his Servant* by unknown artist (previously attributed to Johann Zoffany), c.1765 — bit.ly/3A77tSY

Discuss the trio of paintings, including the similarities and differences in poses, framing, positions and depicted actions. What do these staged 'portraits' tell us about the use of enslaved domestic servants and attendants as status symbols and markers of sophisticated wealth?

MIRROR POEM



Ask the class to use the building blocks of their two free writes to construct a poem that attempts to portray the personalities and inner lives of these enslaved people. Note: They can use ideas from their partners lists from the second free write.

Choose a figure from one of these portraits. Give them the brush. Think of all the struggles and stories of runaways discussed previously in the session. A mirror poem is a reflection of the narrator as they see themselves. What would they say if they had the chance to represent themselves?

RESOURCES

A lusty Negro Man named Johnno, speaks broken English, but pretty good French, short Negro Hair, wears a Cinnamon or light-colour Stuff Coat, commonly has a Violin with him, Run away from his Master the 18th of April last. Whoever secures him, or gives Advice of the same, to Capt. Tho. Jeffers at the Sun Coffee-house behind the Royal Exchange, London, so that his Master may have him again, shall receive as a Reward 10 s. and reasonable Charges.

— Daily Courant, 2 May 1713

BANKSIDE, BREAKING

BY MOMTAZA MEHRI

more sorrow, less shame
more talk of the River that wash out my name
— Derek Walcott, 'Dread Song'

River Lea issues forth. A swelling lament. I forgive myself for what others have done. Limehouse, your workers burn like your kilns. I hide my open face from both. Lungfuls of docklands smoke besiege the chest. Sulphur lines the throat's walls. From here, the water is a blanket of possibility. Risk is gloriously circumstantial. Shorn of livery & lace, I inhale the fugitive smog, few possessions to weigh down this inconspicuous uniform of tatters. Mine, all mine. The ever-mushrooming city opens its slack jaws. Swallows its driftless dreamers whole. I disappear into its mouth and call this a beginning. Harbinger of private catastrophes, I bow my cap to you. We stand alongside each other, this river and I. As ever. Shamefully aware of how little we know of each other. Gut pulls at memoried knot, at the thread of a yet forgotten crisp morning. The day I first spotted a cormorant's inky glide across the port, I looked up at the sky, at the boundless flock above, and knew what banishment meant. We are a remembering people.

We have no other choice.

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BANKSIDE, BEFORE

BY MOMTAZA MEHRI

*What better place than this then could we find,
By this sweet stream that knows not of the sea,
That guesses not the city's misery*
— William Morris, 'June'

Once, I was the hull of an empty belly, the belly of an empty hull. Sweat-drenched atrophy. Alone in fevered visions of Akan hands massaging blossom oil into Akan scalps. Flinching at the desertion of touch, I listened to the sound of another boy's murmured distress. He sounded like me, though I couldn't be sure. I sounded like me, though I couldn't be sure. Bruised flesh keeps its inventory of histories, of tactile trails. Reversed. Reverberating. Alone, for what seemed like an unfurling eternity of starless night. The sea owes no allegiances. Elders made their absence known in their proverbs. Below, the bilges groaned like birthing women. Water lapped against time's blunted procession. I sat without speech, as I sat so often, if given the chance, in the brocaded smoking rooms of reclining gentlemen. Before, I knew only of the cloaked fog behind eyelids. Capture swells the vocabulary of abyss. The darkness of the hold. The hold of the darkness. I conversed with a candle's torturous drip. Wordless, I mouthed a shattered count. Onyame! Your son begged. Still awaiting an opening of forked favour. Oracular spirit! Steady these young, hapless feet. Rain-giver, shower us with your sodden blessings. Encircle me with the crush of hailstones, the battering rams of wind & thunder. Tug at your moon. Scrape the tide back from its regular horizons. Don't leave me to my own devices, to their unutterable vices. Help me bear their language of the lash, their lip of horsetail whip. The graveyard floats. There are lessons in the duplicity of waves. I held my tongue. I held onto my tongue.

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ABOUT THE ARTIST: MOMTAZA MEHRI

Momtaza Mehri is a poet and essayist. Her work has appeared in the likes of *Granta*, *Artforum*, *The Guardian*, *BOMB Magazine*, and *The Poetry Review*. She is the former Young People's Laureate for London and columnist-in-residence at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's Open Space, as well as a Frontier-Antioch Fellow at Antioch University.

FOUND POEMS

GBOYEGA ODUBANJO

A Negro Boy named Goude, aged about 17, speaks no English, Run away on Sunday last at Six in the Evening, had on an old sad-coloured serge Coat, a pair of sad-coloured cotton Breeches, and an old black Tarrey Hat on his head. Whoever brings him to Lyme-house, to Mr John Woodfine, shall have Forty shillings Reward.

– The London Gazette, 23rd December 1686



FOUND POEMS BY GBOYEGA ODUBANJO

Subverting historical texts to create found poems



- Examine and investigate 17th and 18th century runaway advertisements
- Explore found poetry, and the construction of 'Classified'
- Discuss 'treated' and 'untreated' found poems and how to subvert and alter meaning in texts
- Select and edit texts to create a found poem

INTRODUCTION

A found poem is created by taking existing text, reworking it and presenting it as a poem. This is usually done by using words, phrases, or passages from other sources and altering them (by making changes in spacing and lines, or by deleting/adding text) to create new meaning.

Found poetry has similarities with collage-making in visual art. A popular example of found poetry is an 'erasure poem', where a poet takes an existing text and erases, blacks out, or obscures a large portion of it, creating a new work from what remains. This can be done to collaborate with an existing text or to challenge it.

Sometimes, when creating found poems, poets will challenge themselves to only use the words that they have found in the original text. This might also mean using a word the same amount of times it is used in the original text. A found poem that takes words from a text and doesn't alter them in any way (apart from line breaks and spacing) is often referred to as 'untreated', whereas when a writer changes the original text's order or syntax it is then seen as a 'treated' found poem.

RUNAWAY ADVERTISEMENTS

The poem 'Classified' uses quotations taken directly from newspaper advertisements which described enslaved people who had run away from their enslavers. These people placed advertisements in the hope someone would capture and return these freedom-seekers.

Quite often these advertisements didn't include the names of the enslaved people who had run away, or would only include Anglicised names they had been given by their enslavers. Often to identify them enslavers would instead rely on details such as physical descriptions, personality, or how well they spoke English.

Here is one such example:

‘Lost or stray’d on Monday Morning last, from the House of Mr Tobias Bowles, Merchant, in Buttolph Lane, a sturdy, thick, squat Negro Boy, aged about twelve Years, speaks very good English, inclinable to a tawny Complexion and woolly Hair close to his Head, a dark Cinnamon Coat, a strip’d Holland Jacket and Breeches: His Name is Mat, born in Maryland. If any Person brings him to the said Mr Bowles, they shall have full Satisfaction for their Pains.’

Post Man and the Historical Account, 10 September 1719

Other adverts are more explicit when outlining the rewards for catching enslaved people who had run away, for example:

‘RUN away, two Negro Girls, and Sisters, named Jane Gray and Maria Gray; Jane is short and well-set, with the Evil in her Neck, and now very much swelled, 18 Years of Age, and speaks good English; Maria is slender, and rather taller than the other, 16 Years of Age. Whoever will bring either of the above Negro Girls to Capt. Barrett, near Shadwell Church, or to John Fielding, Esq; shall receive one Guinea Reward for ea[c]h. They are Captain Barrett’s Property, and any Person harbouring or secreting them, will be prosecuted for the same.’

Public Advertiser, 20 November 1758



ACTIVITY

Read through these examples with the class and discuss the way in which the runaways are presented. How are they characterised? What do/don't they tell us about these freedom-seekers?

CLASSIFIED

Now read the poem 'Classified' below.

In pairs, ask the class to read the poem again, this time highlighting any elements that stand out to them and discussing them together. Feedback to the rest of the group and compare what was picked out.

The poem would be considered 'treated' as it changes the order of original texts and adds new words. Below is a list of the original phrases which appear in edited form in the poem.



'well-proportioned'

'mark of a diamond on each temple'

'several marks on his face being the mark of his country, particularly one on his forehead resembling a small sprig or flower'

Some other quotations appear in the poem unaltered, however sometimes they have been separated or combined.

Remaining in pairs, ask the class to read the poem again, this time looking specifically for moments that appear to be 'treated'.

Discuss these in pairs. What is the effect of such alterations?

When writing the poem I wanted to highlight the strangeness of referring to people not by their names but by what they looked like. Presenting people as objects whose sole purpose is to be bought and sold.

There were also many adverts which mentioned enslaved people who were 'wanting' — meaning missing — toes or teeth. When I questioned what else they might want my answer was relatively simple, they might want their names. Enslaved people were often referred to in objectifying terms, or often their original names would be either Anglicised or replaced entirely. Seeing the absence of names in so many of the advertisements led to me exploring the ways I could use the found text to develop the idea of the names these people were not given.

Do you think the poem manages to do this? In what way does reading the poem have a different effect on the reader than just reading the runaways advertisements? Discuss as a class.

CREATING A FOUND POEM

Now your students' challenge is to write their own found poems.



The Runaway Slaves in Britain project has a searchable database of runaways advertisements available at runaways.gla.ac.uk/database. The class can use this to search through the hundreds of entries, perhaps searching to look for advertisements from your area, or for runaways who were the same age as them.

Alternatively you could use the same approach to write about a story that is in the news at the moment. If you are using a current story try to get quotes from multiple sources (newspapers, social media, etc.)

Ask each student to think about one aspect of their chosen text that they want to focus on and pick quotations that mention it. For example, 'Classified' is based on quotations about the physical descriptions of enslaved people from runaways advertisements.

Now ask students to identify what it is that they want to say about the story they have chosen. Do they want to add to something that has already been said about it, or do they want to challenge the existing narrative?

Ask the class to use their selected quotations to begin creating their found poem. As they do this, ask them to consider whether they are able to say what they want just using the words/phrases they have picked out, or does the found text need to be 'treated'? If so, how can they change the context or meaning of the text that they have found? What can they add to it?

Once the class have finished their first drafts, ask them to share with the class. Do we notice which text is found and which is added? Can we tell the difference between 'treated' and 'untreated'? Has the poet managed to alter the meaning of the found text?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

If the class are happy to share their work, you can ask pairs to share with each other and to try and spot the treated and untreated text as above. Based on the feedback from their partner, ask students to work on a second draft thinking about how they can alter the text or use spacing and line breaks to blur the lines between treated and untreated to better put across their message.

RESOURCES

Lost or stray'd on Monday Morning last, from the House of Mr Tobias Bowles, Merchant, in Buttolph Lane, a sturdy, thick, squat Negro Boy, aged about twelve Years, speaks very good English, inclinable to a tawny Complexion and woolly Hair close to his Head, a dark Cinnamon Coat, a strip'd Holland Jacket and Breeches: His Name is Mat, born in Maryland. If any Person brings him to the said Mr Bowles, they shall have full Satisfaction for their Pains.

— Post Man and the Historical Account, 10 September 1719

CLASSIFIED

BY GBOYEGA ODUBANJO

we do not know the name black boy aged twelve well-set
with a good grasp of english has run described as agreeable
no vices the young fellow believed to be between eleven
and fifteen has been reported missing from listed address
in the west london area physical description states child
is well-proportioned woolly hair close to head like crown if anyone
is to apprehend the fourteen-year-old and return them a reward
twenty shillings breaking vanished has a west african black
said to struggle with the tongue full eyes all yellow
aged about seventeen heading eastward wanting of some toes a plea
lookout for indian black diamonds at their temples hair curled like the rest
three guineas for capture child still maturing we have been informed
clothed in drugget gown dark cinnamon hat public warned be vigilant
evil visible in her neck if approached by aforementioned black of adult age
this woman in the whitechapel area still wanting toes and front teeth
if she appears wanting of a name refusing english if she has a mark
on her face belonging to her country itself wanting of a name forehead
resembling flower blooming heading eastward still escort back forty shillings

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ABOUT THE ARTIST: GBOYEGA ODUBANJO

Gboyega Odubanjo was born and raised in East London. He is the author of two poetry pamphlets, *While I Yet Live* (Bad Betty Press, 2019) and *Aunty Uncle Poems* (The Poetry Business, 2021). Gboyega is an editor of *bath magg*.

EKPHRASTIC POEMS

OLUWASEUN OLAYIWOLA

A Negro, and 5 Guineas Reward

Absented from his Master in Craven Street, in the Strand, on the 5th Instant, a Negro Fellow, named Cato; who was christened at St Giles's, on the 23rd April last, by the Name of John Rowland. He is supposed to be upwards of 20 Years of Age, and not exceeding five Feet three Inches high, being of a very small Size, but with an old and grave look. He reads, writes and speaks English pretty well, plays on the Violin, dresses Hair, and is well known in and about York Buildings. When he absconded he had on a green Coat, with a red Velvet Collar, and white Metal Buttons. As he may offer his Service to some Gentlemen, it is hoped they will not afford him any Encouragement; and whoever gives Information (so that he may be secured by his Master) to Mr. Blamire, Stationer, the Corner of Craven Street aforesaid, shall receive Five Guineas Reward. N.B. If he returns of his own Accord, he shall be received and his Misbehaviour will be overlooked; otherwise every Means will be used to discover and apprehend him: And whoever harbours and entertains him, will be prosecuted with the utmost severity of the Law.

— The Public Advertiser, 26th June 1771



EKPHRASTIC POEMS BY OLUWASEUN OLAYIWOLA

Using existing works of art to create new poems



- Create writing in response to visual art
- Explore historical and contemporary themes around race and society
- Generate objective and subjective word banks responding to images
- Use different poetic techniques to compose and shape lines of poetry

INTRODUCTION

'An ekphrastic poem is a vivid description of a scene or, more commonly, a work of art. Through the imaginative act of narrating and reflecting on the "action" of a painting or sculpture, the poet may amplify and expand its meaning.'

—Poetry Foundation

An ekphrastic poem can come from a work of art in various ways and serve very different functions: it can help illuminate the history behind the work of art, it can animate different objects and characters in the work (N.B. you can also write ekphrases of dances, film, music, live art etc...), or it can use the visual description of the work to generate completely new scenes and ideas not overtly present in the work.

NO SUCH LUXURY

Below are two different ekphrastic poems responding to the same painting *No Such Luxury* by Lynette Yiadom-Boakye. You can view it on the Tate website here: [bit.ly/3ovDZvW](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-works/no-such-luxury-lynette-yiadom-boakye)

Read the poems together as a class and discuss the following questions:



- What parts of the poems stood out to you?
- Could you see or hear any relationship between the language used in the poem and the painting?
- Were there any similarities or differences between the two poems?
- How do both the poems respond to the title of the painting?

Both poems use description of the image to make the figure in the image speak albeit in very different ways. Matanda uses colloquial language to create a new monologue coming from the inside of the speaker's head that treads themes of empowerment, labour, and self-love. Matanda also uses the title repeatedly throughout the poem which creates a self-awareness, i.e. the speaker knows they are in a painting.

In 'Gossiped Sonnet', the speaker uses images inside the poem (ginseng tea, touchless pinkies, brown walls) to dramatize a strained relation between a mother and daughter. In both poems, the image is a beginning point, a place to start imagining from.

Spread The Word

These are just two examples but both seem to speak to the figure in the painting's position in society; and as with all poetry, the possibilities are endless.

Here are some links to some other ekphrastic poems which explore images that more explicitly explore conflict within society:

- Tracy K Smith's 'Unrest in Baton Rouge' bit.ly/2ZSHqCx which responds to a photograph by Jonathan Bachman bit.ly/3DcxeTL. You can also hear Tracy K Smith reading the poem here: bit.ly/3uLm31l (4:45 in from the start).
- Carmen Gimenez Smith's 'Decoy Gang War Victim' bit.ly/3ozK0wo

STUDYING AN IMAGE

For this activity you will need one central image to work with.

The following suggestions include both contemporary images of enslaved or indentured Londoners from the 18th century, and modern artworks by Olivia Twist and Tasia Graham produced as part of the Runaways London project. Like the examples above, they reveal or comment upon the positions of Black people within their society.



- *Charles Stanhope, third Earl of Harrington, and a Servant*, by Joshua Reynolds, 1782 — bit.ly/3ozT0gg
- *A Young Man with his Indian(?) Servant Holding a Portfolio*, by John Hamilton Mortimer, c.1765 — bit.ly/3mpCEUJ
- *John Orde, His Wife, Anne, His Eldest Son, William, and a Servant*, by Arthur Devis, 1754-1756 — bit.ly/3a5S8Yr
- *A Party Angling*, by George Morland, 1789 — bit.ly/3A9x39T
- *Forgotten Journey of the Enslaved* by Tasia Graham, 2021 — bit.ly/3pbyp24
- *Black-Owned Taverns* by Olivia Twist, 2021 — bit.ly/3vmSXps

You may also choose to use a different image to respond to another subject or topic the class is studying. It can quite literally be anything that seems it might be fertile with visual information.

OBJECTIVE VIEWING

Once you've picked an image, have students take out a piece of pen and paper and divide their paper in halves (or you can have two pieces of paper). Then, give 10 minutes for students to begin describing the chosen image using the questions below to get them started. With the first part of this exercise we are trying to be 'objective' (though this term is always debatable) by just describing what is present in the image:

What can you see in the image? Who is in the image?

What is moving in the image? What is still?

Where was the image taken or painted? What is the setting?

When is it happening?

What colours are there? What's the colour scheme?

What time is it?

What are the figures wearing?

What body parts can you see? What body parts can't you see?

What type of paint is it? Who is missing from the painting?

What shapes are present?

These are just a few questions to get going. If students don't know the answer they can be imagined or invented. There aren't wrong answers, though always encourage students go back to the image, looking deeply. Any other questions the students can think of are welcomed as they try to fill up their papers with descriptions.



SUBJECTIVE VIEWING

After 10 minutes, on the other half (or other piece of paper) the students can begin answering more 'subjective' (also debatable) questions such as:

What do you feel when you look at the image?

Why is the scene the way it is?

Why are they here?

How do the objects or subjects move?

What is the artist or photographer trying to tell us?

Does this image or parts of it remind you of something else?

Can you identify any emotions attached to the image?

Is there a story? If so, what could it be?

Can the objects or subjects speak? What would they be saying?

Again, these are just beginning questions, let students' imaginations run wild.

At the end of these 20 minutes, students should have full sheets with descriptions, verbs, nouns — essentially a very big word bank to begin composing from.



COMPOSITION

Have the students go over their word banks with a pen, or a highlighter. The task is to go through and underline/highlight/circle strong words. Strong words is a deliberately subjective term. Different words will be strong to different students. Strong words might have some of these qualities:



- multiple meanings
- not used commonly
- very accurate description of the image at hand
- active verbs
- a sense of clarity
- rhythmically strong

These are just some; students may have other measures for what constitutes a strong word. Some students may cross out more words than others, this is okay. The point is to get them to feel they are using what they believe are their best words.

Once they have their bank with their best words, this is where they can begin composing. I say composing rather than 'writing a poem' because the latter can add pressure to make something coherent.

Encourage students to begin putting ideas, words, sentiments, images together in ways that feel clear to them. Maybe they want to compose a narrative. All these options are on the table.

Students can work to compose sentences:

'The blue dog strode on the curb into sky.'

In fragments:

'Blue dog curb stride sky'

A combination:

'The blue dog strode. Curb Sky behind it.'

They can repeat words, put unlikely words together, give actions to inanimate objects, inject feelings about the image — really the list is endless.



It's important to add that students are NOT limited to their remaining word banks. If they find that a new word is needed, or function words (as, then, a, the, and) are necessary, that is fine too.

POEMS

Give the students time to work on their composition. After a time encourage them to move towards something they might like to share with the class. As they shape their writing, there are some elements students may want to consider when they refine it more into what we'd call a poem.

You can encourage students to think about some of these elements at whatever level of understanding they have about these concepts. This list is absolutely not exhaustive.



LINE LENGTH

Are you using long lines or short lines?

'the blue dog strode on the curb into sky'

or

*'the blue
dog strode
on
the
curb
into sky'*

STANZAS

Is the piece all one big stanza or multiple?

*'the blue dog strode
on the curb*

into sky'

LINE BREAKS

Does a line break enjamb a sentence? or not?

'the blue dog strode on the curb into sky.'

or

*'the blue dog strode. On
the curb into
sky.'*

SYNTAX

How does the idea reveal itself?

'the blue dog strode on the curb into sky.'

or

'on the curb into sky the blue dog strode'

PUNCTUATION

How does punctuation affect how your poem sounds?

*'The blue dog strode—on the curb,
into sky!'*

or

'The blue dog. Strode on the curb. Into sky.'

These are just some ideas that could be introduced to get the students thinking about the form and craft of their compositions/poems.

Length is not the goal. Some students may have a fine 3 line poem and some may have 25. It is important to stress that quality over quantity is important to poetry.

If there is time and adequate structure to support this, it would be great for students to share their poems with one another; either in partners or as a class.

REFLECTION

This might be the most important section. After any students have shared their work, ask them to reflect on their poems and how they made them. Here are some questions that you could ask them or they could ask themselves:



How does my poem engage with the original image? What's the relationship?

Is anything lost or gained by making a poem about an image?

What do I like about my poem? What would I change if I had more time?

What did I like about someone else's poem?

What parts of the image was I drawn to write about?

What kind of words did I keep when I had to edit my word bank?

RESOURCES

Run away from on Board the Great Sicilian at Limehouse, on Tuesday Night, the 16th of this Instant January, belonging to Capt. Peacock of the said Ship, Peter Bristol, alias John Price, a Negro Man-servant, of about 18 Years of Age, of a Copper Colour Complexion, a large Scar in the Nape of his Neck; this is to give Notice, That if any Body entertains the said Negro indentured Servant, they will be prosecuted according to Law. Any one that shall bring him to the Swan and Rummer in Finch-lane Cornhill, they shall have half a Guinea Reward.

— Daily Journal, 24 January 1728

NO SUCH LUXURY

BY ABONDANCE MATANDA

i dunno about u boy
but i aint got no
such luxury as lookin like
anything less dan god's child
from da beauty of my smile
to da screw of my face
it is by force for all dat
i feel within me to get worn out

so i betta walk out
like say my concrete jungle come
like some runway ! dis is
a intricately crafted crown
i carry so dere aint no such
luxury as lettin it slip as if
i don't always deserve to be
coated & dripped wiv da regality
i was gifted as a birthright.

don't u kno dat
no such luxury exists
as pullin up to dis table
empty handed. even if
all u could bring me
is a prayer between ur palms
or ur finally brave enuff
to lay down ur arms
i cant afford to
have chaos corruptin
dis sanctuary i crafted
wiv da luv dat i
dedicate my days to diggin for
don't u kno dat
i don't serve no food
for no thought
u best consume it!

how can i hold my breath
about a next person tryna
decide if im worthy of more
dan survivin on da sidelines of life
when in my mind i'm centre stage.
da sun don't set until i tell it.

i aint got no such
luxury of waitin to
exhale on ur say so uno
not when i'm set up
to air out or dash way anything
soon as it start to
even look a likkle rotten
trust me i've proper paid for it
dem times dat i lacked

lettin my tongue lay
dormant in it's cave
aint a option! dere's roofs to raise.
glass ceilings to buss. dem shards
must become slippers
for all my cinderellas
who dont kno all now dat
we're worthy of sittin pretty.

i aint tryna give
nobody no such luxury
as hearin my hopeless heavin.
everybody best wait
for me to make a
melody outta my misery
den we can slow
dance dat despair
outta my system. u must can
synchronise ur support
to da sound of my sorrows
once i lay down da riddim
dat i want da luxury of
surrenderin to...

© Abondance Matanda, 2021

NO SUCH LUXURY — GOSSIPED SONNET

BY OLUWASEUN OLAYIWOLA

Spoken from the voice of the figure in Lynette Yiadom-Boakye's 'No Such Luxury'

See, my mother pinched the pink from her lips
and dipped her pickings into ginseng tea, then
like any woman in the setting of another's testimony,
lifted and sipped her long-brewed elixir like worship.
She'd say I was her will, her legacy blood-dark
as a collar cut dry from the skin. She'd say
she didn't hate my eyes, but hate, like love,
was an action, was a gaze puncturing the face—
O how they swung like swords, our touchless pinkies.
At the table, we stiffened into brown walls
creaking like wooded fires though not a soul moved
in our numbed house. She thought me a mirror.
In one sense, I was. But these eyes... these eyes
were a voice: smooth, unblinking, pain-full like jazz.

© Oluwaseun Olayiwola, 2021

ABOUT THE ARTIST: OLUWASEUN OLAYIWOLA

Oluwaseun Olayiwola is Nigerian-American dancer, choreographer, poet, and critic based in London. He recently completed an MFA in Choreography from the Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance.

In 2018, he was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to study in the United Kingdom. His poems have been published by the Tate, *bath magg*, *Odd Magazine*, *Queerlings*, *VS the Podcast*, and *Poached Hare*.

BLACK-OWNED TAVERN PORTRAITS

OLIVIA TWIST

Ran away, a Young Negro Fellow, named Othello, about nineteen Years of Age, stout and well made, speaks good English, had on when he went away, a light Cloth Coat, turn'd up with blue Cuffs and Collar, lined with Blue, plain white Metal Buttons, blue Cloth Waistcoat, with blue and white Lace, Doeskin Breeches, ribb'd Worsted Stockings, Silver Buckles in his Shoes and Knees, and an old Silver-laced Hat; the said Negro was christened some Time ago at London-Stone Church, by the name of Robert Ward. If he will return home (as those, who, It's imagined, corrupted him, are removed) his past Faults will be forgiven; if not, whoever will give Information to Mr James Concanen, in Bell-Yard, opposite the Monument, so that he may be secured, shall have a reward of Four Guineas. The above Negro had with him a French Horn, on which he was learning to play.

— The Daily Advertiser, 28th January 1761



BLACK-OWNED TAVERN PORTRAITS BY OLIVIA TWIST

Creating portraits to recognise and celebrate the history of London's Black-owned taverns



- Discuss history and context of Black-owned taverns in 17th and 18th century London
- Draw quick sketch portraits
- Explore power dynamics in portraiture
- Create A3 images of Black-owned taverns

INTRODUCTION

It may seem hard to believe because of the dominant narratives we are told, but in 1764 on London's Fleet Street, there was a Black-owned tavern. Where on many a night people would be up eating and drinking together.

'Among the sundry fashionable routs or clubs, that are held in town, that of the Blacks or Negro servants is not the least. On Wednesday night last, no less than fifty-seven of them, men and women, supped, drank, and entertained themselves with dancing and music, consisting of violins, French horns, and other instruments, at a public-house in Fleet-street, till four in the morning. No Whites were allowed to be present, for all the performers were Blacks.'

London Chronicle, 16-18 February 1764

The tavern was like no other place at the time for the Black enslaved population. It was a third space. Somewhere where you could be yourself, where you could fall in love. Where you could dance to live music. It is said that generally, Black people appear to have been free to go to pubs and late-night parties, and to travel around inner cities and the countryside. This independence was not something that was taken for granted. It would have been truly sacred at the time.

This session will focus on this overlooked narrative utilising critical fabulation skills. **Critical fabulation** is a term coined by the American writer Saidiya Hartman. It is a sort of creative semi-nonfiction combining historical research with fictional narratives. It aims to bring the suppressed voices of the past to our attention, especially around discussion of the trade in enslaved people.

TIMELINE

- 1586** Earliest records of Black people in Tower Hamlets
- 1596** Elizabeth I orders the expulsion of all Black people from England
- 1773** Phillis Wheatley publishes *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, the first published volume of poetry by an African-American author
- 1786** Sierra Leone Scheme adopted by the British Government to transport Black Britons to Sierra Leone
- 1807** The abolition of the trade in enslaved people
- 1833** The Emancipation Act is passed, giving all enslaved people in the British Empire their freedom after a set period of years
- 1919** Race riots in the East End and other British port communities
- 1948** The Empire Windrush arrives at Tilbury Docks with 492 Jamaican passengers, amongst others
- 1965** Race Relations Act passed banning racial discrimination

DISCUSSION



Introduce the topic of Black-owned taverns to the class, as well as the short timeline of Black history above. Discuss using the prompts below.

Think about the significance of a Black-owned tavern at a time of widespread slavery. Take some time to imagine how a Black person may have felt on their first trip to the tavern? How do you think these momentous occasions were received and celebrated in the few Black saloons and taverns across England? What sort of events do you think might have taken place there?

WARM-UP: PORTRAITS IN PERSPECTIVE

Put the class into pairs, with pencils and paper and ask them to draw quick portraits of themselves and their partner in the same picture. Someone should be close up and the other should be deeper in the frame. Focus on perspective and depth. Think about proportion between the two characters.



Allow about 15-20 minutes. When the class has finished, open up a discussion: does whether someone is close up or far away change how we think about them? Does it suggest a hierarchy or difference in power between them?

Share the three paintings below with the class and briefly discuss what they show us about 17th and 18th century ideas about Black portrait subjects:

- *The Children of Edward Holden Cruttenden* by Sir Joshua Reynolds, c.1763 - bit.ly/3liZWMV
- *Elizabeth Murray, Lady Tollemache, later Countess of Dysart and Duchess of Lauderdale (1626-1698) and an Attendant* by Sir Peter Lely, c.1651 - bit.ly/2YIIIIf
- *An Unknown Man, perhaps Charles Goring of Wiston (1744-1829), out Shooting with his Servant* by unknown artist (previously attributed to Johann Zoffany), c.1765 - bit.ly/3A77tSY

DRAW YOUR OWN BLACK-OWNED TAVERN

Show the class the image Black-owned Taverns below (bit.ly/3vmSXps). How does this differ from the images above?



Now give the class large A3 pieces of paper and invite them to draw their own image of a Black-owned tavern. They should pay close attention to the age range of the punters, dress, class, relationships between attendees. Use the following prompts to guide their thinking:

- What was the occasion? Regular Friday night? Wedding? Emancipation Act just passed?
- How many people were there? Is it crowded?
- Where have people come from? Was it just raining?
- What did the decor look like?
- What does it smell like?
- What can you hear?
- What does it feel like? Does it feel jubilant, does it feel tense?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Create your own tavern signage that would hang proudly outside of a Black-owned tavern. Think about symbolism, the fashion of the time and how typography will work with the imagery.

SHARING AND DEBRIEF

Ask the class to each present their work back to their peers. They should discuss the occasion they have decided to depict and any cultural signifiers they have included.

If there's time, invite the class to provide written feedback on five of their peers' work. They should cover:

- What is working well?
- What is intriguing?
- What could be developed further?



RESOURCES

Went away from his Master the 20th Instant, a Negro Boy named James, aged 15, in a light colour'd Livery, turn'd up with Yellow. Whoever brings him to the Jamaica-Coffee house in Cornhill, shall have 10 s. Reward. 'Tis suppos'd he is gone the Bath Road.

- Daily Courant, 24 January 1718

BLACK-OWNED TAVERNS

BY OLIVIA TWIST



FURTHER READING

- *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, Peter Fryer (Pluto Press, 1984)
- *Power Writers and the Struggle against Slavery*, Eleonora Gilbert (Hansib Publications, 2005)
- *Black Edwardians: Black People in Britain 1901-1914*, Jeffrey Green (Routledge, 1998)
- *Black Victorians/Black Victoriana*, ed. Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina (Rutgers University Press, 2003)
- *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis*, Jonathon Schneer (Yale University Press, 2001)

ABOUT THE ARTIST: OLIVIA TWIST

Olivia Twist is an illustrator, arts facilitator and lecturer from east London with an MA in Visual Communication from the Royal College of Art.

The key threads which can be found in her work are place, the mundane and overlooked narratives. She is determined to make the arts, heritage institutions and arts education more accessible and representative of their local communities. Olivia has a strong interest in participatory design, relational aesthetics and documenting social history as it unfolds. As a practitioner her aims are to provide her audience with 'the shock of the familiar' and to trigger greater intergenerational discussion.

FRAGMENTARY NARRATIVES

MEMOONA ZAHID

An Indian black Girl, aged about 15, with a Brass Collar about her Neck, in a Drugget Gown and a Painted-Callico Petticoat, Run away from Captain John Bowers in Rotherhith, on Monday night last. Whoever brings her to Captain Bowers aforesaid, shall have a Guinea Reward, and Charges.

— The London Gazette, 22nd September 1690



FRAGMENTARY NARRATIVES BY MEMOONA ZAHID

Writing about escape and memory to create fragmentary narratives and experiment with the use of white space on the page



- Explore white space in 'A possible entrance to the moon'
- Use prompts to write from memory and capture detail
- Create metaphors and similes
- Collage material generated to create fragmentary narrative poems

'A POSSIBLE ENTRANCE TO THE MOON'



Put students in pairs and ask them to read the poem listening carefully as they pause at each of the line breaks and gaps on the page.

Ask them to go through it again using a coloured pencil to underline the moments where the most suspense is created (the spaces where the white space is like holding a breath, waiting to find out what happens next).

Words are important in the poem and so is the silence surrounding the words. This exercise will be key to when the students create their own poems using the below prompts.

DEFIANCE

Focus on the opening section of the poem: 'refusing the sound of the moon'.

Ask students to write down four objects, places, moments etc. which have been memorable to them. Ask them to think of physical sensations associated with those moments that they may have experienced — the feeling of happiness, or laughter, or sadness, or anger — what part of their body is it felt in? Is it their fists? Their eyes? Can they be as specific as possible? Ask them to use metaphor, simile, and other literary devices to capture these moments.



For all of the prompts in this resource, ask students to allow space on the page between their ideas, and to only use one side of the page - they will be cutting these out later. They also don't need to create full sentences or worry about spelling or grammar; they are just looking to generate ideas.

Now ask the class to look outside of the window, are there any natural objects which they feel drawn to? The sun, the grass, the sky — be specific, e.g. types of trees, microscopic insects etc. Again, jot these down to capture them.

Next, students should look inside the classroom, in their bag or pencil case — what objects hold a fond memory to them? Write down a sensory feeling attached to the object, or the moment, or the nature.

The speaker in the students' poems will end up 'refusing' these moments:

*'refuses the call of sunrise
refuses her stomach'*

ESCAPE

This prompt focuses on the middle section of the poem: 'whilst ripping out blades of grass she prayed'.

Ask students to think about a time they've wanted to escape. What kind of situation was it? An embarrassing one? One where they didn't feel welcome? Somewhere that was physically challenging? Any situation where they would do anything to get away from that moment.

Write down the situation in one sentence. In the following prompt, you'll discover how to get out of the situation.



Ask students to plunge back into the present of the poem and write about escaping the difficult situation they described earlier. What kind of things did they do when trying to get out of the situation? Did they pray? Ask a friend for help? Devise a plan in their minds? Ask students to be specific. What was the weather like? How did it feel on the skin?

Now ask students to write about the process of escaping that difficult situation. Focus on details which are physical. Was there a physical sensation holding them back? Were the hands and legs integral to the escape? Or was it an escape which occurred in the mind? What were the physical sensations their mind produced?

Ask the students to begin a sentence with one of their physical descriptions:

'my legs felt weak...'
'my nerves were rattling...'

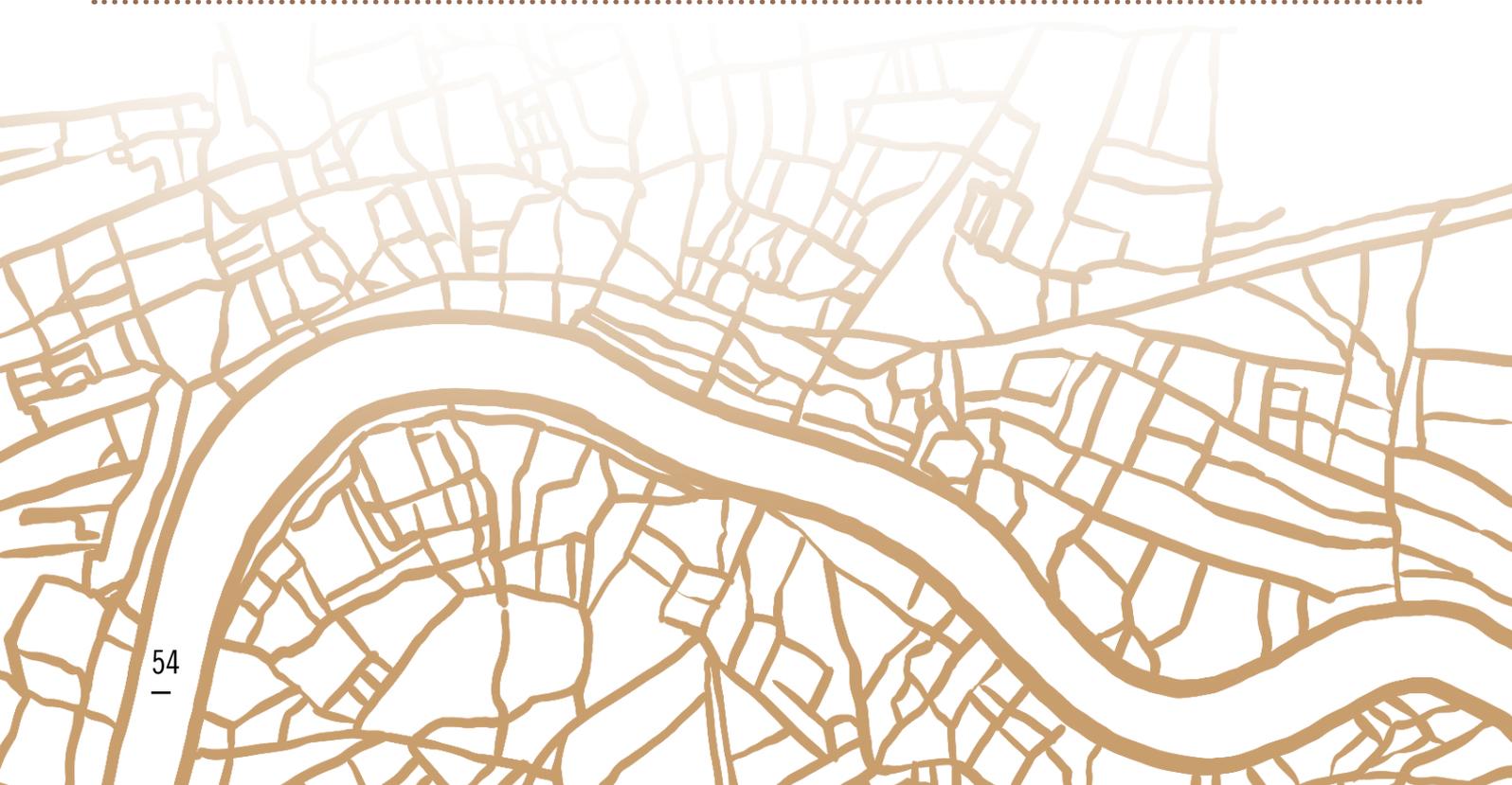
Now finish the sentence connecting the physical sensation with a more abstract feeling about their situation to create a metaphor or simile.

If students are stuck ask them to use 'like a' and then link the description back to their one-sentence description of the situation:

'my legs felt weak like a friend's betrayal'
'my pulse was racing like a run home in the dark'

These moments will create the speaker's escape in students' poems:

'around her neck the brass weighed like a promise ready to be broken'



MEMORY



Memory is important in the poem. Looking back to the past allows the poem to propel forward. Ask students to write about a memory they've kept close to them. Maybe a story they were told as a child. Or a saying that has stayed with them. Who told them this story? Where did it come from?

This memory will show what the speaker yearns for in their poems:

*'ba's words chant through her being
when you find emptiness
stay a while
remember the smell of tangerines
how each is one made by god just for you'*

CREATING A FRAGMENTARY POEM



Now that they have generated their material, students can start constructing their poems.

Firstly, ask the class to read back through everything they've written. Here they can make any edits or changes they'd like.

Now, using a pencil, ask them to circle the moments where they feel certain words or actions have the most emphasis. This is where suspense is lingering or held in the poem.

Finally, ask students to cut out individual sentences, phrases or sections that they've produced. Using A3 paper, ask them to move these sentences around the page creating a fragmentary poem. It can help to do this on different coloured paper so that it's easier to see the space around the lines.

The fragmentary nature of the poem means that events are not chronological; students can use any order. Students should pay particular attention to the parts they've circled and where they fall in the poem. Do they come before or after a gap on the page? How do they create a mood or a tension in the poem?

If necessary students can add additional lines or edit their existing material. Once they are happy with their poem, they can stick down their lines to create a finished version.

Ask any students who are willing to share their poems. They should read them out, and also show the rest of the class how it looks on the page.

RESOURCES

RUN away about twelve Days ago from his Master, a Black Boy with Wool Hair, about twelve Years old, with a gray Livery, trim'd with Green, and brass Buttons, and a Steel Collar on his Neck; whereon is engraved thus: (Quarw, belonging to Mr. G. Woodcraft, Attorney at Law in the Poultry, London) Whoever will bring him to his said Master, shall be satisfied for their trouble.

— Post Boy, 5 July 1718

A POSSIBLE ENTRANCE INTO THE MOON

BY MEMOONA ZAHID

she sneaks lavender from the gardens
slips it

under her pillow

drowsiness opens inside her
& fear
festers in her limbs but she sleeps

& refuses the sound of the moon
refuses the blisters on her palms

the same shape of ba's eyes

refuses the call of sunrise

refuses her stomach

its eternal presence like the wind humming against hanging
clothes

fear opens a fist at her neck
sickness is her only reprieve –

she imagines her sleep

becoming a grave

the soil littered with a field of fallen winter honey suckle
not ma or ba surrounding her
but gallons of soundless earth

;

every beginning is a middle so she begins
open

down her middle

a throat
torn apart

Spread The Word

overripe apple

on the roof of her mouth
she remembers the name ba gave her

a mouth knows the shape of a word even when it's left unsaid

for years

her tongue traces

back & forth over her front teeth

she's waited to say it aloud

only now
like a bird
escaping its aviary
does she dare –

Pari

;

whilst ripping out blades of grass she prayed –
around her neck the brass weighed like a promise
ready to be broken

the sky

a whirlpool spinning out god's answer:

Run

Layla devised

the plan
hair tied up
sleeves rolled up

her face
like Moses after emerging from the ocean

in the other house
Layla's fingers bled
each bandage wound tight

Spread The Word

half a moth glides on to her palm

ba's words chant through her being

when you find emptiness
stay a while
remember the smell of tangerines
how each is one made by god just for you

;

she had tried to escape once before
she wanted to disappear
dreams of her evergreen face
evaporating into fog
came to her like flying ants
suddenly everywhere

;

her teeth loud
rain-like
cold

the ceiling touches the tip of her head
a spider web against her eye
a fly hissing as the spider crawled

the world is an eye
it watches as she wanders through
the movement of her limbs

the inside of her arms
grey like the wings of the fly

the eye watches her mind as it forgets the shape
of the bones in ma's face

days after
her hands cradle her knees

she yearns to belong to something light
her idea of heaven

or somewhere warm somewhere
with summer rain & Layla's voice

;

she had not expected this
her people with their arms speaking into other arms

the lull of their voices
in beat with the drums

the afterglow of a heavy sunset as it swims into the walls
the smell of bread

her mouth a child again
her mouth allowed to be a child again

she knows she's loved like this before

unrelenting

like cherries

cold against her forehead her cheeks

she swallows seed after seed
ripping apart the fruit with her teeth
savouring the ache in her throat as she beckons

a forest
to replace her physical being

;

Layla is nowhere

inside her eardrum

an echo

Spread The Word

like the inside of a shell

lost

;

Pari casts her eyes over the river
instead of trembling water she sees
a crowd of faces like her own

mouths wide & wailing
the same song

among them ba & ma

floating up to the scintillating deep sun
the way the angels had gone
into a lavender infused sleep

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ABOUT THE ARTIST: MEMOONA ZAHID

Memoona Zahid is a poet and editor of Pakistani heritage, currently based in London, with work appearing in various publications. She is a Ledbury Poetry Critic and alumna of the University of East Anglia's Creative Writing Poetry MA.

Runaways London is an arts heritage programme which engages with archival evidence of enslaved Londoners of the 17th and 18th Century, who escaped their enslavement to find new lives in the City.

A team of young poets and artists of African and South Asian heritage developed a series of poems and artworks responding to so called ‘runaway slave’ advertisements published in London newspapers between the 1650s and 1780s.

These resources, created by the participating artists, lead your class through their creative processes to produce poems and artworks responding to the project.

Resources in this series are:

Black Balls and Shaped Poems by Abena Essah

Collage Illustrations by Tasia Graham

Reimagining 17th and 18th Century Runaways by Momtaza Mehri

Found Poems by Gboyega Odubanjo

Ekphrastic Poems by Oluwaseun Olayiwola

Black-Owned Tavern Portraits by Olivia Twist

Fragmentary Narratives by Memoona Zahid

The Runaways London anthology containing all commissioned poems and artworks, and a short film about the project can be found at: spreadtheword.org.uk/runaways