



RUNAWAYS LONDON

TEACHING RESOURCE KS3/4
OLUWASEUN OLAYIWOLA



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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.

This resource by poet Oluwaseun Olayiwola takes your class through their creative process to produce their own poems responding to this theme.

The Runaways London anthology containing all commissioned poems and artworks, further teaching resources 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

ACTIVITIES

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.

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...

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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*.



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

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