

**Young
Writers
Collective
Anthology
2025**



**SPREAD
THE WORD**

First published in Great Britain in 2025 by Spread the Word.

Copyright © remains with the authors.

Photographs copyright © Kashif Haque.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission of the publisher.

The moral rights of the contributors to be identified as the authors of this work have been asserted in accordance with the Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988.

ISBN 978-1-9998254-8-5

Designed by Katrina Clark

Photograph by Kashif Haque

Cover art by Kareem Parkins-Brown

Spread the Word

The Albany

Douglas Way

London

SE8 4AG

spreadtheword.org.uk

The Young Writers Collective is supported by Spread the Word.

Contents

Preface	1
Introduction	3
Contributors	
Anya Hunt-Byer	5
Alice Foxall	7
Brandon Treacy	10
Dominique Vincent	12
Ellie Spirrett	15
Husna Memon	18
Julia Motcho	20
Mariana Cadena	22
Maisie Faul	24
Poppy Amberg	26
Precious Ogunlowo	28
Simone Eligon	31
Tilly Woof	34
About the Poets	38
Acknowledgements	42
About Spread the Word	43
About Young Writers Collective	43
Contact Us	44

Preface

by **Courtney Conrad**

It is with immense pride and joy that we present the first anthology from the Spread the Word's Young Writers Collective. This anthology stands as a testament to the courage, creativity, and growth of a remarkable group of young poets who have spent the past seven months exploring the power of language and self-expression.

Guided by the wisdom and generosity of esteemed poets Tolu Agbelusi, Rachel Allen, Anthony Anaxagorou, Malika Booker and Caroline Bird this cohort has blossomed in ways both profound and inspiring. Some arrived with experience, while others were trying poetry for the very first time. Yet, each writer has stretched their creative muscles, discovered new depths within themselves, and found the confidence to share their truths with the world.

This anthology is more than a collection of poems—it is a celebration of emerging voices, of stories told with boldness and vulnerability. These poems pulse with curiosity, honesty, and a hunger to explore what it means to be alive in this moment. We are so proud of this body of work and the poets behind it. Having witnessed their passion for poetry grow firsthand, I have been deeply moved by their dedication and the way they have supported one another on this journey.

We hope you find in these pages not just words but windows—into the hearts and minds of a new generation of writers who remind us of the power of poetry to transform, to heal, and to inspire. May their work invite you to write, to reflect, and to connect more deeply with your own story.

Enjoy.

Introduction

by Tolu Agbelusi

What is poetry if not a place where we come to ask questions, to meet the humanity of each other and be moved to become more attentive, more joyful, more loving, more, empathetic, more. These poems offer precisely that.

When I was asked to be Lead Facilitator on Spread the Word's Young Writers Collective, the only answer was yes. I was excited to sit in exchange with young people eager to broaden their experiences and articulations of the world through poetry. At a time when arts initiatives are being decimated and courses and initiatives that promote critical thinking are being cut across institutions, it is a thing of joy, that Spread the Word chose to create and facilitate this space for poets to come together, think, write and critique each other in community.

In this anthology, these young poets bring their unique perspectives of the world to life. It is the first time most of them will have their work published. Through their stories and contemplations, they lay assertive claims to the right to be fully themselves, wherever and however they choose to be, especially amongst the doubts of youth and the chaos of being human.

This is the case, whether their poems are speaking about place, as in the poem 'Here' by Tilly Woof, from which the title is drawn:

I think here knows me
I think I'm known here
I think this is where I'm supposed to be.
Right?

Speaking about the body as in 'Ghazal for Single Sided Deafness' by Anya Hunt-Byer, which ends:

In such moments,
she wouldn't change her
circumstances for the world.
Freely deaf.
Blissfully deaf.
Exceptionally deaf.

Or asking a question that is both specific and all-encompassing as Ellie Spirrett does in 'Chest of Drawers Speaks Out':

Why does she keep running to the things that will kill her?

Here gather poems of longing, of grief, of lament, coming of age, identity, political angst, domestic violence and all it means to be alive. Like the poets who wrote them, these poems are not afraid to ask questions, to change their minds or stand in vulnerable truth. We live within the bindings of mortality and whilst we are here, poetry is a way to remind each other we are not alone. These poems are maps and legends marking this moment in time and saying you belong to yourself, we belong to each other and this too are ways to navigate within the binding.

Ghazal for Single Sided Deafness

Anya Hunt-Byer

Sometimes, a newborn babe is born congenitally deaf,
Her inner ear asleep, boneless, compartmentally deaf.

Her redeemer arrives with scalpel and batteries, eager to *fix* her.
On her knees, lacking equilibrium— pray-for-me- deaf?

Hearing words like 2D protocol - *unilateral deaf*,
Man's explicit tongues captioned by fistfuls of bleeding palms, tonally deaf.

Their savoirism tries to kiss her, something to sink their teeth into,
She reels the cost- they devour and love us, horribly deaf.

She wonders what it means to love a woman, freely.
The answer? No dissection, no cure, just truth- Queerly deaf.

One foot *implanted*, *cochlear* ablaze, she kisses you.
Religion becomes her fingerpicking guitars and you're listening

Missing the beat-

Of abstract notes
sounds fistful,
hearing aid batteries
entangled.
In such moments,
she wouldn't change her
circumstances for the world.

Freely deaf.

Blissfully deaf.

Exceptionally deaf.

O O
\
()
|

Kodak Moment

Anya Hunt-Byer

So, we meet again.

She picks it up: the Minolta 404 DSI—

The lens: D i S f l g U r l n g l t ' S s E I F

To focus on the moment.

*A flash
A dark room;*

*Two bodies lying in a bed at 1 am.
A bokeh of hands wrapped around each other,
Heartbeats shuttering against chests
Chiaroscuro bedsheets kissing naked skin,
Pillows cradling heads*

Freeze -

What is the opposite of time?

Flash sync, 1/90th of a second; Then -

Lens shifts to double exposure,

Double exposure,
Gives way to

Thaw

The hitched sound of a rib cracking;
Fragmented into augmented fourths.
The sound of it falls on empty ears.

Lens irrigating under the weight of realisations,

Autofocus gives way to manual,

Tears tonguetied by time
Captured by a wide aperture lens

Two bodies lying in a bed at 1 am.

Another J Name I Now Resent

Alice Foxall

I never liked your Spotify playlists
or your unkept hair
never liked the melody of your words
as you tried to lie politely.
I never liked the movies
or the late-night calls
never liked how clammy your hands made mine as
you clasped them in the dark.
Like electrons repulsed by the charge of each other
we are parallel lines
glancing in each other's direction
destined never to coincide and
I'm completely content.

But since you ask,
I still smell it.
The stench of selfishness and solitude
follows you like the flu.
People call you brother, son, friend
but your soul is used and tarnished
like the car you crashed last year
trying to find yourself.
Do they know?

You stick to my memory like spider webs tangled
between my tendons.
I tell myself
that you will be the one to cave in
Becoming nothing but dust and aching
You will.
youwillyouwillyouwillwillyou
Look to me with eyes ice blue
as they all leave you the way you left me.

Reach for me one final time
and I will come running.

Don't take me

Alice Foxall

Please don't take me yet
I have only just discovered how much better pasta tastes out of a bowl
and that if you blend the matcha powder with the syrup it stops them separating
I've only just perfected cooking chicken
(perfecting it once is once enough
I won't be doing that again but)
Lord, it feels good to know.
Please don't take me yet,
I met a girl.
I think I might love her.
I need the chance to try.
She smells like sleep and honey
and smiles like she knows things I don't.
I finally have a routine for laundry.
My light can survive my dark and
there is in fact no use in fabric softener
or for gut health fizzy drinks
that taste as bland as city skies
Or holding onto my hatred for those who don't apologise
like a God holds onto eternity.
I know
It was not so long I was wishing in reverse
for your hand to smite me and take me away from this place
where the chicken is always raw
and the pasta always goes cold
but I hope you didn't hear me.
I get on with my brother now
in ways I never thought I could.
My favourite flowers have a name I can't pronounce and
a smell I cannot describe
he brings them to me every birthday and Christmas.
Sometimes in between.
My optician's appointment is next month.

My Spanish class starts next year.
My life starts after just one more heartbreak.
Please
To whoever it may concern,
Don't take me
Just yet.

Lament for the Voiceless Dead Of The Irish Potato Famine

Brandon Treacy

No blankets for the young
No coffins for the dead
No pillows for the suffering
No prayers left unsaid.
If God exists, did he hear the dying children's pleas?
A hopeless desolate path they trekked
Thrown to their deaths in the storm
Walking the road of hunger
No pity from the sun to lift them from their slumber.
Death doesn't wear a black coat.
He isn't armed with a scythe.
He's armed with a ballpoint pen he used to sign away a million
lives. The blight's cause was unknown.
The Famine was the doing of men.
The people could have been saved in their time of need
If only life was greater than greed.
The people laid unburied in the streets
Familiar sights. History repeats.

Man of the House

Brandon Treacy

I'm not ready
for your life, your story to decay.
I'm not ready
for my life to turn unsteady.
Why do you have to age? To fade away?
What about the path I walk, who'll guide my way?
I'm not ready.

Twists

Dominique Vincent

I loved them until I didn't.
Shrinkage made them barely chin-length
a chunkiness that felt childish
I swore I'd never wear them again
length the only priority.
Later that year I got heat damage
a gift for my 18th birthday
so, I cried as I held the limp imitation
of my curls and refused to cut them off.
YouTube breeding hair type obsessions and
Hair porosity dissections
Pink Oil Lotion gave way to
Shea Moisture.

I learned to let my hair breathe.
The sizzle of wet hair on a straightening comb
abandoned for the 'natural way'
of air drying with LOC or LCO.
I never figured out which one
was better. No shape to my afro
but she wasn't to blame. She was
never out for long 'messy unruly hair'
needed to be tamed.
When the afro grew tired, I
found myself returning to twists.

Ignoring side eyes and
'what's that on your head',
Wash days became carved out respite,
TV catch ups and camera rolls filled
with awkward angles of half head curls
and an Afro appreciated at every length.

What Happens When the Stars Stop Shining?

Dominique Vincent

In a room of scattered glow-in-the-dark stars,
I learnt how to dream. Comfort was knowing
that universes existed on the bookcase by my bed
tucked beneath my tower of pillows
every night a new adventure.
I was princess and knight
completing the quest and vanquishing evil with death
Just like the stories
in pursuit of peace everlasting.

But the curiosity of a child is unfortunate.
Closed doors, a dare and hushed tones, a challenge.
I learnt that death was not about saving kingdoms
it was illness and decay
and mourning
long before Death made an appearance
all-encompassing yet hollow
and coming for us all.

So, I thought about death in the same room.
The stars long turned to ruins, yet to be excavated
buried along with the fairytales that had been moved
to storage. Amongst the darkness, it mocked me.
Reshaped storylines, implanted figures
and I would tell you more
but it's a bad omen to utter your dreams of death out loud.
They made a home in me
and once marked, I saw it everywhere
but I didn't feel it until I heard my mother's cry of grief for her own.

How quickly that child resurfaces and the adult hides.
The adult can tell the child that it's just a monster in the closet,
But the adult knows the truth.
And they can't tell if it's their heartbeat or breath quickening in the silence
or if that weight in their chest is its firm grip
or the realisation that
everything has changed
and you'll never get it back.

Meeting the Fates In A Hospital Wing of Old Memories

Dominique Vincent

I was offered a choice
and that choice breathes like fatal medicine,
blank sheets that act as gravestones
and the looped echoes of heart monitors
no longer plugged in.
I stand in a hall that no longer holds lifelines,
untethered, stranded by lifts that never stop
and rooms that always look the same.

'Do you want to forget or to remember?'

The question ushers in silence
and three figures now stand across from me
eyes covered by cloth.
They hold my life in their hands.
"Rough", they say, "unfinished".
They bring it to their lips and pucker.
Sour, like yearning for a land
whose only legacy are stories crafted in the mind of a child.
Not stolen, not gifted,
woven together with scavenged pieces:
small treasures from my grandma's suitcase
scans of photographs aunty refuses to part with
and a cassette of a sermon delivered
by my great grandfather.

Do you want to forget or to remember?

I tell them the truth.
That this abandoned hospital I wander
feels familiar and I have to find out why.
Why there is never enough disinfectant
to disguise the different ways death can oppress
like in names forgotten or records burnt.
Why I can't shake restlessness that rings like tinnitus
Why I feel like I've forgotten before
and it led me back to this place.

Rapunzel, If Her Voice Came With Her

Ellie Spirrett

Mother, the sky held your voice
up to my face with its knuckles
and I did what it asked me.
I pushed my head on the wind
like fingers on a bruise.
I did not cry
when my scalp tore.
I still feel it in my hair.
The hands that ripped my body from
the window like skin off a wound.
The same hands that held me and told me I was
beautiful. I was worth climbing for.
He watched you call me out into the sky.
He knew how to hold my hair so it wouldn't let me go.
I cut my hair for him
with you still in it, choking on your own stairs.
He brought me down to a world that used
to be a scene I watched through a gap in the bricks.
I learnt I don't need hair to be dragged
through windows. I do as I am told.
Mother, I don't know how to breathe down here.
You only taught me how to breathe
clouds.
I know how to withstand pain
so when he holds me and tells me I
am the most beautiful thing he has ever found,
I breathe like you taught me to.
I close my eyes and imagine the world
is a scene through a gap in the bricks.

The Chest of Drawers Speaks Out

Ellie Spirrett

They crack everything but themselves.
They dug their nails into this house and split it open.
I can feel the walls scratching my spine trying to fight back
or run away. This is not a home anymore.

The man frays carpets and scuffs the walls with his voice.
It is stained with alcohol rings
and when he is gone the echo flops like a fish
that's jumped out of a boiling fishbowl.
I heard him say "the worst thing a man
can do is to hit a woman."
But haven't I seen him bury them
into a bed until they are feathers?

The woman stuffs all this down the back
of the washing machine. Lets corpses pile.
Once, her cheek wacked against mine and chipped us both.
She left my wound open long enough to soak
the lingering force of his fist from the air.
Then, without bothering to sand out the splinters of his voice,
she trapped it under thick paint, the closest
colour she could find to my wood.
Can't you see the brush lines, exposing her trembling hands?

But the child watches from the corners of the room
and every day she becomes more wooden and less girl.
When the house is still again, and the cracks hide,
she runs between the man and the woman like a pendulum
trying to bring time back to its natural rhythm.
Why does she keep running to the things that will kill her?

Smoking on a broken roof during a pandemic

Ellie Spirrett

And when I am about to leave, he puts
his fingers around my waist like a spliff.

This is the part I am good at,
being lit from my twisted-up head.

He holds me on his lips
and smokes me into the sky.

When I'm up there, I stare
at the city until it blinks.

I watch it slip in and out of lockdowns.
I watch it crush up another year.

He always says this city is so ugly
especially next to us.

We've been waiting for it to sick us up.

Devoured

Husna Memon

Hung and quartered, open for your delight.
Limbs testing faith like last year's kidless goat.
A sacrifice - take your hand off their throat.
Clingfilm cocoon, sausage, sous vide, airtight
Oozing inwards, triple cooked egg-white
Sockets salivate, digits slyly gloat
Puckering seams filled with folded note
-s - hook to the neck - a welcomed backbite.
Bodies and personas begin to turn.
Punctured and charred. Soft tyres. Bitumen. Bound
by joints, I am presented before you.
Anticipation floods our tongues, we yearn
Flayed, capitalising on each pound.
I pervade even after the last chew.

Evergreen

Husna Memon

Bouncing boundaries and flimsy faith, *Ma* condones again.
Reconciling. For *his* love, we freely atone again.

Ruthless rainfall inebriates the earth, shaken and stirred.
Sarah's wandering gaze - betrayed, *we* turn to stone again.

Early morning calls filled with steep words and shallow talk.
Red card. Green passport. Her last words haunting - *please phone again*.

Wrists bound by garlands of jasmine and unbroken cycles.
Keeping to tradition by procreating to clone again.

Autonomy ignored. Opinions rebutted. Parents
keep forgetting their evergreen babies are grown again.

Candle-less cakes. Vacant gift boxes. Balloons filled with yester
-days complaints. Instead of hope, she dares score wishbones again.

Commotion reverberates through floorboards and skin; cracked walls
and duvets. Seeking solace, she puts on headphones again.

Losing myself to the sea within. No contacts to be
my lifeline - *I*, alone, must tackle the unknown again.

Solar Eclipse

Julia Motcho

Love, a natural phenomenon,
recurring, yet destined to fleet.
A rarity in celestial form,
where singular souls now meet.

I, lone soldier forged in fire and pain,
Her, a temptress whose pull moves the main.
A stolen sight - a brief embrace
will be ours for the first time
in a while.

Although I may not spend eternity by her side.
Only I know how she perpetually shines
reflecting her into the night.
The mechanics of our love, made of rare design.

Even when she is asleep
our essence conjoined, a sacrament.
As in the night, I show an outward sign of her inward grace
but today is different
When the world is dark and we are alone
I'll see her face
beautiful as the sun she is.
Where she and I converge at last,
we finally get to kiss

Evasion

Julia Motcho

Men seek endless shelter
between the sheets.
Queen bed meets eyes
gentle then green.
When he seeks, she weeps.
Even then sweetness feels
well spent...

Transitory

Mariana Cadena

One time, I was an arrow,
Piercing flesh in battle.
It wasn't my fault
The knight sent me, forcefully.
But the guilt stayed,
Even when they pulled me from the boy's chest,
Even when they burnt me with
Winter's fire
Used and reused, until I was
Nothing but ash

One time, I was a drop of rain,
Falling into the River Thames.
In that instant, I became dirty,
Blended with the rest of the water,
A nameless part of the current,
Carried away, forgotten.

One time, I was only a feeling,
Fleeting, in a stranger's chest
Gone until summoned by a similar
Ache.
Between those moments,
I ceased to exist.

One time, I was the fire,
Raging through the city,
Feared and hated for my hunger,
But I wasn't evil
I only wanted to keep existing

One time, I was the last plant in
winter,
The others gone,
I stood alone,
Wondering if we could have made
It,
Had we been born in a sunnier place.

One time, I was chewing gum,
Stuck to the sole of a shoe,
Face pressed against the
Pavement,
Until I lost my stickiness,
And because something else
No longer needed, no longer wanted.

One time, I was someone's last breath,
I entered without knowing,
A fleeting visitor,
Afraid to leave,
Afraid to never be again.

One time, I was only a concept,
Born in the mind of one,
Harmless,
Until shared with the world,
Spreading into actions I couldn't control.

And the Pen Goes Down Like I Do

Maisie Faul

My hair, it grows in sentences
A sensation
In
Its
Arrogance
Inherited from others ink
whose pens go down like I do
They Jut Out
 wonky
and piss
poor, but can point
and smash
and walk where the gray curb keeps them
long
enough to lead us home

testimonial

Maisie Faul

I don't remember
the age that kept me
mushy, soft-gummed and
I don't remember my first taste of toothpaste
its gentle routine its first introduction to the last stimulation before bed
bum on the toilet seat and bristles
ensuring
future tastes
mum would pledge a pea on my instrument
let the tap cry for a future that is suddenly here
so slice my eyes
Into thin naked numbers
that roll around
that edge the plug
dregs
of some bullshit
account.
We still
sit
we still
praise
we still
balm,
the decaying of my
self
Is a
self
righteous account
of a deepdown

breezeblock.

Love Mum
Poppy Amberg

Open door close door
wave arms circle motion
one way other way

daughter alone daughter independent

rest elbow table top flat palm under jaw
bare teeth pout lips knit brow scowl ahead
shame again hurt inside
rage onward feral colour

loud music soft music pant hard
go weird wear shoes different shoes sweat through change clothes walk hard
push neighbour electric jam sore knee funk right jaw ache lie down sleep now
hair awry hair up hand rub don't stop

pack bag carry load go downward
muddy ankle deep fungus dig around scratch earth pick bark brown impale
kneel up bark loud kneel down face flat mud mouth worm tooth cadaver touch
muck absorption peace sensation pussy embrace

self harm self mutilate take photo art made
wank again eat words swallow tears soft pillow dream arrival

listen now silent forever
wonder why question her
bleed some love mum
empty resent shame over
crave more cradle me

here comes sniff air speak now
change up draw up wake up make good

evening forgiven romance mornings embrace desire
hear her call her.

Body At Night
Poppy Amberg

I did once have this body. These holes and rises all. One I sought displeasure from in a scratch on bark and wood. At last a finger nail did come away and bleed some on the grass. I did then sharp inhale through nose and held it there. And there in eyes aflame, I sucked that tip there dry.

Again now scrape those tips on bark. In the dark of middle night. With moon ahead and yes no wind, the night it has this bath effect. Scrape away and see what happens. Bark does yield in sudden strips in the steam of night's near blackness. Nails do slow before they tear. Then tear and fall and nail no more.

With naked stubs of fingertips I do though still scrape on. Give thanks to tree and fluid of night for the pleasure of here now's pain. For a night-long ecstasy. Where blood congeals in sticking palm lines and spines of blades of grass.

I do now have this body. It's hurt is in this now this dark. So sharp inhale and feebly out at last I am my body. Release day's hold with bleeding tips that clutch that yielding bark. Oh, here, pleasure.

Sun on rise reveals my body is not me unless submerged. A shaft of day's translucency and oh, there, neutrality. Though finger nails do reattach in wait for sun to fall again. For night to fill the bath. For feral pleasure in pain's warm clarity.

Let the words take over

Precious Ogunlowo

I can't speak so I'll write instead
Giving space
Let what's unsaid be said
If the words take over
If we start to undress
The abuse that I've suffered
Heavy traumas well kept
So to you I confide
As I try to express
I behave as I do
From this pain I've suppressed
Seared memories of dread
At the hands of _____
stolen innocence addressed

Can you meet me at this address
I can't address
Emotions
spiralling
Perhaps perplexed
How is it that my caregiver, gave me no care?
Emotions
Spiralling

I'm not depressed
But the feelings
I can't process
Younger me
I'm burning to protect
Knocked out
Unconscious
Laid bare, on the cold wooden flooring
Understand....

Everything they can't remember
Is everything I'm struggling to forget

Scarce within the generation

Precious Ogunlowo

I am unique, vibrant. my kind is scarce within the generation.

I don't feel the need to follow social trends.
No, I'd rather be the shepherd than the sheep.
At peace with the world, but at war with yourself
why do you walk as though you are asleep?

Snapchat, Instagram
got us watching but not listening.
Impressive falsity over authentic reality.
You're not seeing the vanity of this world
but being blinded by the whirlwind.
Why should I be fixated on materialistic things?
Listen. The deadliest illness is the one we don't know we're suffering.

Choose to see the good in people,
to me that's not feeble,
it's what it means to be a disciple.
I believe that what you give in this world, is what you get out of it.
Every cause has an effect
So be mindful the impudent words you eject and the people you disrespect.

Be true to your word and loyal to all.
When you stand for nothing, to anything you'll fall.
For me, my word is my bond.
Yes I'm quick to listen
and even when it's hard, I'm slow to respond.

In the face of adversity, still I persevere.
God is my light and only Him shall I fear.
Irrepressible - my faith knows no limits, and sees no boundaries.
I soar and I leap
there is no end in sight for me.

I make my own choices and stick by them.
You can say what you want, but the Lord's my confidant.
Leaning not on my own understanding, but a heavenly guidance.

What would happen if you chose to view your failures as just another
stepping-stone to your success
something that no one will ever be able to suppress
and let every fibre of your being protest
to all those who want to see you down and depressed.

I choose to see the glass half full, rather than half empty.
Don't be fooled. The devil has tried, and tried again to tempt me
but Jesus Christ is my exemplary.

No label placed upon me will ever stop me from reaching my full potential.

The Things We Grow

Simone Eligon

She turns on the lights,
There's mould in the shower,
Black holes sucking
The walls, the ridges—
Pressing against her, finding home inside
The fall of her lungs,
The folds of her brain,
The thrum of her heart—
Do you feel them too?
Bottom cupboard, lowest shelf, easy enough to reach
The peroxide that could scrub her clean
Off the bone—let her organs
Crawl, tender, down the drain, But—
What would be left?
She stares at it all,
The water runs,
There's mould in the shower,
She turns off the lights.

Notes From A Wannabe Salamander

Simone Eligon

When a ligament tear left a black hole
between my ulna and humerus, I wanted to be

a salamander, tissue webbing together
to make myself anew, yet I remained

nnapped, the tendon harvested from my wrist
weak like a baby, the surgeons said, useless

to tie me back together again,
our climbing days ended,

still, I wanted to hold my frail piece,
bright white and small in my hands,

but they already threw it away,
its cries reaching for me beneath the rubbish,

as I imagine running my hands
across my body, cutting out

all four thousand tendons,
lining them across my walls,

ramrod straight, like a general, or a mother
Before her kids walk out the door,

inspect them, berate them, test them,
whisper—

*Have you eaten enough?
Are you rested?
Will you come back to me?*

fingertips sliding over their lips,
burying their answers in my calloused palms.

The Confessional Box

Simone Eligon

I live in shades of guilt,
indigo, violet, lavender,
mulberry grape wine
sipped on Sundays. Perhaps

it's the Catholicism,
eight-years-old, and my relationship with God
suddenly welcomes an unwanted third during mandatory confession,
my head bent in technicolour before the priest,
repentance refracting off my stained-glass tongue,
scrambling for sins I'm not sure exist.
Confess—I left God over ten years ago,
confess still echoes through my joints,
muscle memory sealing me in purgatory.

Or, maybe, it's just the Britishness,
the blue, white, and red mixture bruising
like blackberries crushed against my Black cheek,
shame looping through my bloodstream,
as I build a confessional box from my bones,
a thousand sorrows pulled from my lips,
for all the innocent mistakes,
stumbling over all the violent wrongs.

Confess—
Sorry instead of excuse me,
Sorry for expanding out of myself,
Sorry for every sin that leads to sorry
upon remorseless sorry upon silenced sorry.

Echos of Tomorrow

Tilly Woof

Warily sifting through bold lettering,
dreading what looms,
you meander through moments,
muttering controlled resistance.

You see us as a fallen oak, I urge you to remember;
the lady who returned your earring,
the park child who carefully picked and plucked your favoured flowers.

You listen, momentarily.

You still recycle, despite knowing
the line was carved before you arrived.
Yet, you giggle and grin, you gather with friends, and discover a meaning beyond.
Faith in Him. Faith in us.

Tomorrow will shock you to your core.
Next week will be outrageous.
You will pace the kitchen, whilst I prepare a breakfast that you will not eat.

I will feed you toast and take you to the trees.
For you, panic is dangerous. I know this.

An old child, cloaked behind trench coats and caffeine.

The universe will hold you.
Delight in that.

What Dumb Luck

Tilly Woof

He never taught me how to hold
to bare my bones, open my wounds.
He never taught me nothin'.

I made myself plain for him,
a sponge to merely absorb.

But he didn't like sponges.
'It feels weird'

He is right.

I cannot carry this alone,
and he will not carry it for me.

HERE
Tilly Woof

Nothing moved,
Or removed
I'm here again
It stays the same
I used to hate it here
within the binding
Here pulls at me, tightly.
Trapping me within the rolling of its days,
with my wrists behind my back
my shallow breath in its hands.
I am here again
I keep coming back here.
I think I know here,
Here holds me, takes its time sitting
with me in its grasp.
I breathe
I am settled
I breathe once more
and I am here again
I like it here
within its perimeter.
I like the sounds and the colours,
Sparrows' songs and sliding slopes,
I think here knows me
I think I'm known here
I think this is where I'm supposed to be.
Right?



About the Poets



Anya Hunt-Byer is a writer, actor, and artist. Her work explores the complexities of sapphic love and the Disabled experience. In 2024, she debuted on stage at Theatre Peckham with Poetic Unity's Spoken Word Theatre Company and showcased their art in NC Production's "Shades of Resistance" exhibition at the Bomb Factory, Marylebone. Anya trained at the Oxford School of Drama on their foundation course and holds a First Class Honours degree in Creative Writing from Birkbeck University.



Alice Foxall (she/they) is a multidisciplinary artist based in London. Having studied biomedical science at university her work is often sci-fi inspired. Her dystopian short stories and poetry podcast, *The Project*, was released in collaboration with Roundhouse this year. Her short film on being mixed-race and cultural dysphoria is currently being shown at the Migration Museum until Spring 2025. These themes are becoming more apparent in her work.



Brandon Treacy (He/Him) is a Writer and Filmmaker who possess a BA in Film. Since graduating he has worked on a sold-out award winning play and is currently writing a TV Pilot. His work explores themes such as Identity, legacy, history, connection and resilience.



Dominique Vincent (she/her) is a poet and filmmaker born and raised in South London. She has a Bachelor's in English Literature and Film from the University of Reading. She was a part of the 2nd Iteration of the V&A's Inwrds Cohort in 2024. Her work covers the different dimensions of Blackness particularly through the lens of archiving and reclaiming history. Dominique's Sierra Leonean Heritage is also a common theme in her work.



Ellie Spirrett is a poet and member of Spread the Word's Young Writers Collective. She writes about disability, ableism, friendship and the loneliness epidemic. Ellie is the self advocacy coordinator at Lewisham Speaking Up, an organisation that supports people with learning disabilities to campaign for their rights.



Husna Memon (they/she) is a London-based artist, educator and poet with a BA (Hons) in Fine Art & Art History from Kingston University. They are interested in exploring the intersectional experiences of bodies in the diaspora in their practices. Their poetry addresses topics and themes of language, migration, identity and belonging. Husna is in the National Youth Theatre's Poetry Collective 2025 cohort. Their poem *My Father Has Three Tongues* was shortlisted for the Disabled Poets Prize 2025.



Julia "JULZ" Motcho (she/her) is a poet and songwriter who writes on topics surrounding loss, love and issues of intersectionality which manifest through Blackness and neurodivergence. She has a Bachelor's degree in Law and has transferred those writing skills to more creative endeavours. Her work has appeared in the Tate Modern, representing artists of South London. She is mainly a written artist, although is expanding into spoken word as seen in her participation in Mind Over Slammer.



Mariana Cadena is a writer with a background in film and works as a Spanish teacher and tutor for young children. Born in Mexico to Mexican parents, she was partly raised in French Canada and England. Writing primarily in Spanish and English, Mariana explores themes of culture, identity, migration, relationships, loss, and social commentary. Her work reflects her multicultural upbringing and diverse experiences. She currently resides in London with her family.



Maisie Faul has recently graduated from London Contemporary Dance School where she developed a practice that integrates writing and text for performance into movement. Her writing tackles themes of home, and time. While studying she questioned the performative element of composing a text culminating in a part written, part performed dissertation piece. She worked on a team of intern editors for a Dance Art Journal publication of these works.



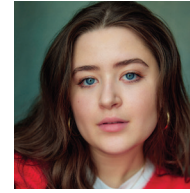
Poppy Amberg is currently undertaking an MA in Non-Fiction Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia. Her writing is informed by the tenets and intersections of queer theory, autotheory, and experimental writing. She lives in London.



Precious Ogunlowo is a highly commended SLAMBassadors poet whose writing explores the complexities of human experiences, including self-discovery, identity and culture. She holds a BSc in Politics and History from LSE, with her work featured in Young Writers anthologies and published on the LSE website. Precious has also worked as a Unit Stills Photographer on a BFI-funded film, and her passion for storytelling extends beyond poetry into visual arts and media.



Simone Eligon (she/her) is a South London creative with a degree in Film and Media Studies with a concentration in Screenwriting from Yale University. Her work focuses on Blackness, the body, and masculinity. When she's not busy writing, Simone can be found in goal on the football pitch for Chatham Town FC.



Tilly Woof (she/her), is a performer and writer. She specialises in writing plays and long form content. Tilly's introduction to poetry began when she was asked to write a piece with Theatre Royal Stratford East (2022). She has successfully written two complete plays since 2022, with her third premiering at The Union Theatre, London, in early 2025. Topics covered by Tilly include; girlhood, grief, conscious asperity and the comedy in absurdity.



Tolu Agbelusi is a poet and artist working across theatre, film and photography. Author of *Locating Strongwoman*, her work is published widely, and she has performed internationally including at Medellin International Poetry Festival, Pa Gya Ghana, Cheltenham Lit Fest, etc. Tolu supports the development of emerging writers through mentoring, editing and has designed and facilitated several creative writing courses including Home Sessions, a development initiative for Black poets. She has also taught for Arvon, Poetry School, BBC Words First, etc. Her work is concerned with the unperformed self and deconstructing received narratives, particularly on womanhood, race and social justice.

Acknowledgements

Spread the Word extends our heartfelt gratitude to the contributors who worked effortlessly to write their poems: Anya Hunt-Byer, Alice Foxall, Brandon Treacy, Dominique Vincent, Ellie Spirrett, Husna Memon, Julia “JULZ” Motcho, Mariana Cadena, Maisie Faul, Poppy Amberg, Precious Ogunlowo, Simone Eligon and Tilly Woof.

We would like to thank the Albany and Deptford Lounge for their support.





Special thanks to all the facilitators on the programme Tolu Agbelusi, Rachael Allen, Anthony Anaxagorou, Malika Booker and Caroline Bird. We are immensely grateful for their passion and commitment. Thanks also to Katrina Clark for designing this booklet, Kareem Parkins-Brown for the cover art and Kashif Haque for the poets’ headshots and group photo.

About Spread the Word

Spread the Word is a literature charity and an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation. Our work is focused on engaging Black, Asian, Global Majority, deaf and disabled, LGBTQ+, working class and low-income writers, and young people.

We find new ways of using creative writing and reading to engage communities through programmes co-produced in partnership with diverse writers, local organisations and libraries. We run inclusive creative writing programmes and offer practical ways for writers to get their work into the world. We discover Londoners who love words, nurturing those who want to write, read and share stories.

We have been growing the work we deliver in our home borough of Lewisham including the annual Deptford Literature Festival and community projects with Youth First, Entelechy Arts, Triangle LGBTQ+ Centre amongst others. We have a big bold vision to have Lewisham named the UK’s first Borough of Literature.

-  spreadtheword.org.uk
-  [@spreadthewordwriters](https://www.instagram.com/spreadthewordwriters)
-  [@spread-the-word.bsky.social](https://twitter.com/spread-the-word.bsky.social)
-  [@spreadthewordwriters](https://www.facebook.com/spreadthewordwriters)

About Young Writers Collective





Young Writers Collective is an artist development initiative and community for poets and creatives aged 18 – 25, looking to expand their artistic possibilities. Throughout this weekly program, the cohort creates new poetry pieces while gaining insights and experience in publishing, performing, collaboration, facilitation, and experimental writing.

Contact Us

If you would like to find out more about the Young Writers Collective project and contributors, please email:

Ruth Harrison | Director
ruth@spreadtheword.org.uk

Courtney Conrad | Programme Manager – Community Engagement
courtney@spreadtheword.org.uk

-  spreadtheword.org.uk
-  @spreadthewordwriters
-  @spread-the-word.bsky.social
-  @spreadthewordwriters