

these are the words. Fearless verse to find your voice by Nikita Gill

Macmillan 9781529083606

A lyrical and empowering collection for older readers – pre-teens and teenagers will find particular resonance in Gill’s compelling voice. The poems are arranged according to such themes as sisterhood, family, protest and healing, and although some difficult topics are addressed, a line of hope shines through.

Much of the verse is written in second person, thereby speaking directly to the reader with love, support, and reassurance – the peritext, too, holds the readers’ emotions with care, opening with a content note and closing with a list of related charities. This is a book that serves as a friend or confidante to the reader, saying “here is a space just for you”.

This collection was shortlisted for the 2023 CLPE Poetry Award.

Overall aims of this sequence:

- To develop the skills of reader response through the use of book talk, close reading and critical reflective study of a selection of poems.
- To interpret poems for performance
- To gain and maintain the interest of the listener through effective performance of poems
- To recognise how a poet uses poetry as a voice to express their own feelings and views
- To explore how poetry is presented on the page to enhance our understanding
- To draft, compose and write poems based on personal interests, experiences and emotions using language and form with intent for effect on the reader

This teaching sequence is designed for an Upper KS3 class

Overview of this Teaching Sequence:

This teaching sequence is designed to be delivered over 10 sessions, but teachers will want to use their own judgement about the length of time their class will need to spend on each of the sessions.

This collection deals with a number of strong themes. At the start of the book, there is a **‘Trigger warning’** which states: **‘Mentions of anxiety, depression, non-graphic sexual assault and abuse, heartbreak, homophobia, biphobia, racism, misogyny, trauma and grief.’** Teachers exploring this sequence will need to be aware of any students who may have faced similar issues in their own lives before exploring this text with a class.

This sequence provides the opportunity to critically reflect upon and respond to the ways in which language is used to express, convey, represent, symbolise and signify pertinent points, themes and messages. Reader response and group discussion prior to personal reflection on poems explored form an integral part of a number of the sessions detailed in this sequence.

Pupils will have the opportunity to read poetry, listen to poems being read, offer personal responses to the poems, to prepare them for performance and to write their own. The whole sequence builds towards the chance for the class to write and perform their own poems on a subject of interest to them.

The students will have the opportunity to use the knowledge they have gained about form and structure throughout the sequence to decide how to present their poem on the page as well as consider how these could be performed to an audience. The poems can be published in a class anthology to be shared with the school community and even wider audiences in a variety of ways.

Teaching Approaches:

- Reading aloud
- Looking at Language
- Role on the Wall
- Re-reading
- Emotional mapping
- Book talk reflections
- Shared writing
- Free writing of poetry

Outcomes:

- Text Analysis
- Identification of poetic language and devices
- Performances of the poetry in the collection
- Evaluation of performances
- Poetry Journal with ideas and inspirations for writing
- Own poems related to themes introduced in the collection

Exploring poetic forms and devices:

This collection gives an opportunity to explore the following poetic devices:

- Rhythm
- Assonance
- Alliteration
- Metaphor
- Enjambment
- Repetition
- Refrain

Cross Curricular Links:

SMSC:

- The collection might inspire a study of societal changes within recent generations, for example, in relation to the role and rights of people of colour, women and the LGBTQ+ community, and over time to the present day.

- Information on women's rights from the British Library <https://www.bl.uk/womens-rights>, Plan International <https://plan-uk.org/act-for-girls/girls-rights-in-the-uk> and Amnesty International <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/issues/womens-human-rights>.

Computing

- If students choose to create recordings of the poems that they write at the end of the sequence, they might need access to video editing software to add effects, voiceover, to layer in additional imagery or text or to add music.
- Word-processing software might be used by students to publish their finished poems.

Links to other texts and resources:

Books by Nikita Gill:

- *SLAM! You're Gonna Wanna Hear This*, chosen by Nikita Gill (Macmillan)
- *Where Hope Comes From* (Trapeze)
- *The Girl and the Goddess* (Ebury Press)
- *Great Goddesses* (Ebury Press)
- *Fierce Fairytales* (Trapeze)
- *Wild Embers* (Trapeze)
- *Slam Your Poetry: Write a Revolution*, Miles Merrill and Narcisa Nozica (New South Publishing)

Selected books previously shortlisted for CLIPPA:

- *Rising Stars*, Ruth Awolola, Victoria Adukwei Bulley, Abigail Cook, Jay Hulme and Amina Jama (Otter-Barry Books)
- *Overheard in a Tower Block*, Joseph Coelho, illustrated by Kate Milner (Otter-Barry Books)
- *Everything All at Once*, Steven Camden aka PolarBear (Macmillan)
- *Rhythm and Poetry*, Karl Nova (Caboodle Books)
- *Booked*, Kwame Alexander (Andersen Press)
- *On the Move*, Michael Rosen, illustrated by Quentin Blake (Walker)
- *Run, Rebel*, Manjeet Mann (Penguin)
- *The Crossing*, Manjeet Mann (Penguin)

Weblinks:

The poetry section on CLPE's website contains a wealth of resources including videos of poets performing their poems and talking about their writing process, which will inspire students in their own performances and writing. This can be found at: <https://clpe.org.uk/poetry>

Here you can:

- Look up poets by age range or themes, enabling you to access a wide range of poetry to inspire budding poets.

- Find examples of student's work around poetry, including videos of performances submitted for the [CLIPPA School Shadowing Scheme](#).
- Find resources to support subject knowledge around poetic forms and devices.

Nikita Gill has a dedicated poet page where you can find her poems and videos:

<https://clpe.org.uk/poetry/poets/nikita-gill>

Teaching Sessions:

Session 1: Introducing the collection

- Share with the students the front cover of this poetry collection, reading aloud the full title and poet name. Invite the students' responses. *What does the title suggest about the theme of this collection? What does it mean to be **fearless** or to **find your voice**?* Ask the students if they have heard of Nikita Gill already and if so, what they know about her. Students may be aware or even follow the poet on her social media sites or have encountered her writing in her books.
- You might explore some of her social media posts together and make a collection of her work for the students to read and revisit. You could see Nikita Gill perform one or more of her poems on CLPE's website, in order to learn more about how she writes and what motivates her, such as:

[The guy my parents want me to marry asks me to describe myself](#), from *SLAM! You're Gonna Wanna Hear This*, chosen by Nikita Gill (Macmillan)

- Invite the students to share their initial responses on hearing the performance. *What did it make them think about? Why was this? How did it make them feel? What made them feel this way?* Give the students, individually or in pairs, a copy of this poem and allow time and space for them to read and respond to the text, text marking with their thoughts, feelings, questions and ideas about the piece in mixed pairs or small groups to share ideas and interpretations. At this point, allow the students to reflect as a reader, without telling them to specifically look for poetic techniques or devices, although it is fine if they do this naturally.
- Come together to share what Nikita Gill is sharing about herself in this poem; her experiences, her beliefs, her motivations and how this connects to or allow them to expand on their ideas about this new collection of poems. You might revisit the cover design, for example, and make connections between the astrological constellations and her references to horoscopes and other beliefs. Invite the students to discuss how this poem reflects their previous experience and understanding of poetry, what they think it is and what it can do. Scribe the student's ideas to revisit throughout the teaching sequence.
- Return to the front cover and re-read the title **these are the words**. What do you think this means? What kinds of words might we find in this collection? What tone might the poems take if they are **fearless verse to find your voice**? How might the poems be **fearless**?
- Now ask the students to reflect on the wider themes they anticipate Nikita Gill might explore, based on their understanding of her at this point. Scribe these on the board.

- Explore the concept of having or ‘finding a voice’. Encourage the students to consider their own experiences of having or wanting to find a voice. *What does it mean to have a voice? Who do you feel has a voice in your experience? What do you wish you could voice or speak about? What do you wish others would hear? Are there some things that you or other people might find it hard to voice?* Students might prefer to explore these prompts privately in a poetry journal rather than give voice to them verbally and with the wider group. Provide opportunities for students to use their journal to explore and express responses and ideas in response to this collection.
- Turn to the back cover and read the blurb. *How does this connect with our predictions for this collection? What topics or themes do you think might be prevalent?* Invite the students to reflect privately on what they think they will most relate to and what interests them most in the potential themes and why.
- Open the book to the Contents pages, flicking through them slowly and reflecting on how these themes have been organised within the collection and which parts of it they feel most compelled to read first. Look at the seasonal links in the section titles. *What might this reflect, why might this particular order have been chosen – starting with summer and ending on spring? What connections do you have to these times of the year?*
- Return to the beginning of the Contents on page vii and draw attention to the entry, ‘Before We Begin...’ Turn to page 1 and read aloud the poem, inviting initial responses; what it evokes; what makes the writing poetic; what further impressions it gives us to the poet’s motivation and intent for this collection and her reader; what role this poem plays in the collection.
- Give the students a printed copy of the poem for individuals or pairs to re-read and revisit together. *How does the poem on the page add meaning to our initial responses?* Invite them to read it aloud, finding the rhythm in the words, and trying to encompass the voice and register what they think the poet might have intended for it. *What is she trying to tell us about herself and why? How does she want us as her readers to feel? How does the rhythm in her writing support this? How does its layout – the line breaks and punctuation as well as the enjambment – support them to pace their reading and with appropriate intonation to create meaning? What effect is the poet trying to create?*
- Before 15th June 2023, this could be filmed and submitted for the [CLiPPA shadowing scheme](#) competition to win poetry prizes, including the chance to perform on stage at the National Theatre as part of the award show.
- Return to the idea of a collection that explores **all the things that Nikita wished someone had told her when she was younger**. Invite the students to begin to note anything in their journal that they wish they could say to their younger selves and why; what do they know now that would help them then? Support thinking by sharing an example or anecdote, based on your own experience, such as ‘taking a risk might lead to new opportunity.’
- Provide students with the first of the four **Signs of...** spreads that signal each seasonally inspired section of the book and – after explaining what Horoscopes are – invite the students to explore the suggestions and affirmations attached to each sign and talk about what they might mean and how they relate to aspects of their life. *Why do they think Nikita Gill and others like to take guidance from these words of advice? How do they relate to the way she has written the poem, ‘Before We Begin...’?*

Session 2: Poetry can offer hope

- Turn to the section 'girlhood, womanhood and sisterhood' and on to page 9. Without yet revealing the poem, invite the students to respond to the illustration. *What are their immediate responses? What thoughts and feelings does it evoke and why? What connections are they making to their own life experience or something they have seen in the wider or a fictional world? What time of day do they think this scene is set? How would this affect the mood being created? If you had to summarise what this picture represents for you, what word or phrase would you use and why?* Scribe ideas on the board.
- Now read aloud the title 'ON THE FIRST WAVES OF SUMMER' and invite further responses to this. What images or emotions does this evoke and why? Scribe further responses, encouraging the students to draw on and share personal experiences of Summer both as younger students and now.
- Now reveal the poem and show Nikita Gill performing it on the CLPE Website: [Nikita Gill | Centre for Literacy in Primary Education \(clpe.org.uk\)](https://www.clpe.org.uk). Invite the students to share their initial responses, and compare it to their predictions, before providing them with a copy of the poem to read for themselves. Allow them time and space to respond to and discuss the poem in mixed pairs or small groups, providing them with question prompts as appropriate to explore and expand their thinking around the poem:
- How do the poem and the illustration work together to make meaning? You might draw attention to the poem's placement on the page, as though rising or setting with the sun. Which do they think it is and why? How does this connect to what the poem is about?
- What is the poet trying to say to her reader? How does she want them to feel and what relationship is she trying to create? Consider the free verse form of the poem and why the poet may have chosen this form rather than strict verse, for example. What difference would this make in creating a bond between poet and reader?
- How does the poet create imagery for the reader and why is this important for this particular poem? What language choices have been made? What images or memories might it evoke in your own life?
- Discuss with the students how the theme of this poem relates to their own life as they move from childhood to young adulthood; the things they feel too old for now that they once loved, the things they still love and want to hold on to as they grow older, and the new possibilities now open to them.
- Take time to reflect on the poetic devices and language choices used in the poem. *What patterns do they notice in the poem's structure or the language choices? What impact does this have?* You might draw attention to the repetition of 'ice' which runs through past and present experiences in the first three stanzas – **ice-cream truck, ice-cold water, ice lollies** – as well as three repeated references to sensory experiences – **scraped knees, feet just touching, sticky fingers**; the opposition in the first two stanzas, **Too old for...** and **But still young enough to...** and the effect this has, in particular how our feeling might shift from one emotion to another from one stanza to the next and how the conjunction **But** might be intended to lift us from loss or longing, or even dismissal, to the **still** enjoyable experiences of now. Students could explore the impact of this pre-modification 'still' by removing it and reflecting on the difference in emphasis or meaning.

- Explore the impact of the punctuation and organisation of the poem as a whole; the full stop as end punctuation in the first stanza which signifies earlier childhood experiences and comparing this choice to the punctuation chosen for the end of the second stanza, a comma, and the impact that has on the way we read and understand the meaning being made. *Why do you think the poet has continued with what the subject is still young enough for – **strawberries, ice lollies and sticky fingers**. – across the line break and into the beginning of the third stanza, before using the full-stop?* Re-read the line that follows with the students – ‘This is the litany of crushes and hopeful probabilities,’ – inviting their interpretations and the connection they are making to their own experiences. Again, explore the impact of continuing this idea across the line break and into the final stanza in which the reader is welcomed into ‘almost womanhood’. *Why do you think the third stanza holds what is still enjoyed from childhood and what is to come rather than them being separated? What does this suggest and how might this relate to the experience of growing up and making the transition into young adulthood?*
- Once the students have had time and space to explore and interpret the poem, encourage them to re-read it aloud, reflecting on the impact created by the poetic devices and language choices.
- Provide groups with a selection of poems from the collection that express similar sentiments of change and hope, perhaps starting with those that preface each seasonal change in the collection:
 - ‘ON THE FIRST LEAVES OF AUTUMN’ p.54
 - ‘ON THE FIRST FROST OF WINTER’ p.85
 - ‘ON THE FIRST FLOWERS OF SPRING’ p. 142
- Give the students ample time and space to read and respond to each of the poems, including revisiting ‘ON THE FIRST WAVES OF SUMMER’; discussing their effect on them as a reader and their interpretations. *What do they convey about the collection as a whole and what we anticipate we will read about? What sense do they give us to the emotional journey we might be taken on? Why do you think the poet has chosen to start with Summer and end with Spring? What difference does this make? How do we connect this to growing up or to our own lives?*
- Invite each to choose the poem that they have found most memorable and to organise themselves into like-minded groups. In preparation for a performance reading, ask the students to reflect on why they choose this poem, what they feel is unique about it. *If you were to perform one of your most memorable poems, how might you do this? Would it be best performed individually, in pairs or as a group? How will you pace the performance? How will you use your voice(s) to help tell the story of this moment? Will you use any movement or action?*
- Give time for the students to build up their poems, text marking with performance notes and ideas, practising, editing and polishing to a finished performance. Before 15th June 2023, this could be filmed and submitted for the [CLiPPA shadowing scheme competition](#) to win the opportunity to perform this poem on stage as part of the award ceremony at the National Theatre.
- Allow opportunity for the students to watch, reflect on and evaluate each other’s performances. *What did each interpretation add to your understanding of the poem’s central theme?*

- Finally, reflect on the reading you have done so far. *Are you engaged with the collection so far? Why or why not? What kinds of reading strategies and knowledge are you drawing on to gain an understanding of what is being expressed? How does reading poetry compare to what you usually read? How do these poems compare to those you already know?*
- You might give students the opportunity to read and enjoy various other poems in the collection with hope and reassurance as a central theme, such as:
 - ‘A BLESSING FOR THOSE STILL WAITING’ p.32
 - ‘LESSONS FROM THE WILD’ p.151

Session 3: Poetry can give voice

- Begin the session by turning to the section ‘the signs at the beginning of Autumn’ and giving students a copy of the spread on pages 50-51 and opportunity for personal response, before reading aloud ‘THIS POEM IS A LEGACY OF FOOD’ in the ‘family’ section on page 55.
- Gather the student’s initial responses. *What did it make them think about? Why was this? How did it make them feel? What made them feel this way?* Give the students a copy of this poem to re-read and text mark with their thoughts, ideas and questions and then explore the language and poetic devices used to create an effect on the reader. You might support discussion with question prompts:
 - *What is the central theme of this poem? What is it about?*
 - *What is the effect of the repetition and what might this say about the poet’s family dynamics? What do you think is the poet’s motivation for writing it? What might she be trying to express?*
 - *Who is her audience, do you think?*
 - *Does she agree with her family’s habit of offering food ‘instead of apologizing.’ Or ‘instead of saying sorry.’?*
 - *Is she content to say ‘thank you’ to these offerings? What makes you think that?*
 - Explore the impact of the language choice in the auxiliary verb in the line, ‘You **will** smell the spices.’ compared to if it had been modal ‘You **should** smell the spices.’ *What is the difference in meaning and how we interpret each?*
- Encourage the students to draw on their personal experiences of relationships, either within family or friendships. *How does Nikita’s family’s way of dealing with conflict compare with their own experience?* Invite students to imagine and discuss how the various peace offerings were conceived as well as received by each family member. *What else might have been thought and said? What sentiments might have been **unlanguageable**, in their experience? What is the impact of the only dialogue in the poem being the recipient’s ‘thank you’ at the end? What else could have been said and by whom?*
- Allow time for students to explore this theme in their poetry journals. They might want to reflect on expressing what might be ‘unlanguageable’ in their own family relationships through free writing or in the form of a diary or letter. They might explore how apologies are expressed in ways other than words and how this makes them feel, resigned or accepting or relieved, for example.
- Provide groups with a small selection of poems chosen from the following in the ‘Family’ section:

- 'A LOVE STORY' p.10
 - 'THE MANY MOTHERS' p.13
 - 'WHEN YOU COME OUT TO YOUR PARENTS AND YOU ARE NOT MET WITH LOVE'
 - 'WHEN YOU COME OUT TO YOUR PARENTS AND YOU ARE MET WITH LOVE'
 - 'ABSENT FATHER'
 - 'HOW COME MUM WAS ALWAYS THERE THROUGH EVERY HEARTACHE?'
 - 'A BROTHER NAMED WAR'
 - 'SHARED HISTORY'
 - 'ON BEING THE OLDER SISTER'
 - 'ON BEING THE YOUNGER SISTER'
 - 'THE CAT ON AUTUMN DAYS'
- Give the students ample time and space to read and respond to each of the poems, including revisiting 'THIS POEM IS A LEGACY OF FOOD'; discussing and comparing their effect on them as a reader and their interpretations. *Which poem(s) captured you most and why? What kinds of emotions are evoked by reading them? What connections do you make with your own life? With whom do you empathise and why?*
 - Once the students have an appreciation for the overall shape and structure of the poems, invite them to look at and text mark other poetic choices that have been made, such as the words used that convey mood such as desperation, hope or despair; repetition, line breaks, enjambment, the tone and voice employed.
 - Invite each to choose the poem that they have found most memorable and to organise themselves into like-minded groups. In preparation for a performance reading, ask the students to reflect on why they choose this poem, what they feel is unique about it. *If you were to perform one of your most memorable poems, how might you do this? Would it be best performed individually, in pairs or as a group? How will you pace the performance? How will you use your voice(s) to help tell the story of this moment? Will you use any movement or action?*
 - Give time for the students to build up their poems, text marking with performance notes and ideas, practising, editing and polishing to a finished performance. Before 15th June 2023, this could be filmed and submitted for the [CLiPPA shadowing scheme competition](#) to win the opportunity to perform this poem on stage as part of the award ceremony at the National Theatre.
 - Allow opportunity for the students to watch, reflect on and evaluate each other's performances. *What did each interpretation add to your understanding of the poem's central theme?*
 - Following this, give students time to use their poetry journal to reflect on their own family relationships and memories that are significant to them in their childhood and more recent past. Encourage them to use the journal as a means of expression; in recalling an event, family dynamics or common behaviours, they might begin to make sense of and cope with - as well as validate - their own responses or emotions, as well as appreciating the complexity of human relationships as young adults.
 - This might be an opportunity to explore wider issues that are important to young people, especially in navigating adolescence, relationships and valuing identity. The following

organisations are listed at the back of the book and can be supportive for young people and those around them:

- [Mind](#)
- [The Proud Trust](#)
- [Young Minds](#)
- [Anxiety UK](#)
- [Samaritans](#)
- [No Panic](#)
- [Cruise Bereavement Care](#)

Session 4: Poems can validate us

- Begin the session by sharing two poems 'WHEN YOU NEED BOUNDARIES' on page 75 and 'YOUR FRIEND'S PAIN' on page 88. You might start by reading the titles and inviting predictions. You may want to read the poems aloud in turn before giving students copies of both poems, so that they can read them for themselves, exploring how they sound, what they look like on the page and discussing their interpretations.
- Invite students to share their initial responses to each; if it is what they expected; what connections they make to their own lives and experiences before reflecting on what they think is at the heart of each poem; the poet's motivation for writing each; how she wants us to feel as her readership.
- Once students have had chance to share initial impressions, ask them to explore and text mark the language choices and poetic devices used and the impact they have on them as readers. *How does the overall shape and placement of the poem on the page affect our response and the meaning we make? Why might the front slash symbol (/) be used instead of line breaks in 'WHEN YOU NEED BOUNDARIES'? What might this tell us about the way in which we pace the reading? What difference does this make? What is the impact of this being a poem of two multi-clause sentences with no end punctuation until the end of the poem? What effect does the space on the page under the poem have on us as readers?*
- In 'YOUR FRIEND'S PAIN', how does the poem's placement and space between stanzas affect us as readers? How does it differ in the way we read this poem? From whose perspective are we reading each poem? Where are we placed as readers? How is punctuation used or not used within and between stanzas? What is the impact of punctuation or enjambment?
- Are there any words or phrases that are particularly vivid or memorable to you? Why is that? What patterns do you notice in the language used or in the rhythm of the poem? What effect does this have?
- Come back together as a group to summarise interpretations and what students feel are the central themes running through both poems, how they are similar and different, how they resonate with their own experiences of growing up and of navigating relationships.
- Invite students to choose the poem that they feel resonated with them most and to organise themselves into like-minded groups. In preparation for a performance reading, ask the students to reflect on why they choose this poem, what they feel is unique about it. *If you were to perform this poem, how might you do this? Would it be best performed individually, in*

pairs or as a group? How will you pace the performance? How will you use your voice(s) to support your interpretation? What tone will it take? Will you use any movement or action?

- Give time for the students to build up their poems, text marking with performance notes and ideas, practising, editing and polishing to a finished performance. Before 15th June 2023, this could be filmed and submitted for the [CLiPPA shadowing scheme competition](#) to win the opportunity to perform this poem on stage as part of the award ceremony at the National Theatre.
- Allow opportunity for the students to watch, reflect on and evaluate each other's performances. *What did each interpretation add to your understanding of the poem's central theme?*
- You might provide a wider selection of poems from the collection for students to read that take the tone of reassurance or affirmation around themes of growth, self-care and validation, such as:
 - 'SPACE' p.14
 - 'THINGS THAT FEEL LIKE HOME' p.15
 - 'SOMETIMES YOU MEET A WILD GIRL' p.18
 - 'ON SELF-WORTH' p.34
 - 'YOU'VE CHANGED' p.39
 - 'OTHERS HAVE IT WORSE', p.89
 - 'FOR THE DAYS YOU FEEL UNHEARD' p.90
 - 'FOR WHEN YOU ARE TIRED OF BEING CALLED STRONG' p.91
 - 'FOR WHEN YOU NEED VALIDATION FOR YOUR ANGER' p. 102
- Provide time and space for students to use their poetry journals to record their responses to these poems and reflect on the connections they may be making with their own lives and experiences. *What inner feelings or belief do they hold that they feel needs validation? What do they feel can't be expressed out loud but could be expressed in writing? If they were to reassure a friend or younger sibling, what would they say?*

Session 5: Poetry can challenge and strengthen our sense of self

- Begin the session by providing three poems for the students to read, revisit and respond, in the ways previously shown; with the ear, with the eye and through personal and affective reader response before exploring the poetic devices and language choices in more depth:
 - 'YOU'RE NOT LIKE OTHER GIRLS' p.16-17
 - 'WHAT GOOGLE DOESN'T TELL YOU' p.108
 - 'WHAT I WEIGH' p.132
- Allow ample space and time for discussion around initial responses and impressions before asking students to compare and contrast their interpretation of and preferences for each of the poems; the connections they are making and the human themes they feel are being explored in each and across the three.
- Now ask students to text-mark the poems, exploring the devices and language choices and the impact these have on them as readers. *What do they feel the poet is trying to achieve?*
- Consider the themes being explored in relation to the students' own lives and experiences and take the opportunity to engage in debate and discussion around the issues that are important

to them. *Does everyone in the group make a connection? Why? Why not? What other issues are important to each of them, and to young adults in particular, that Nikita Gill or other writers might address?*

- You could take this opportunity to introduce them to more of the poems in the collection that are centred around such issues, for example:
 - 'THINGS THAT FEEL LIKE HOME' p.15
 - 'WHEN YOUR BABY SISTER ASKS YOU IF SHE'S PRETTY' p.23
 - 'WHEN YOU AREN'T READY TO SAY I LOVE YOU' p.27
 - 'YOUR NAME' p.35
 - 'YOUR OWN SKIN' p.72-73
 - 'THE WISH' p.77
 - 'OTHERS HAVE IT WORSE' p.89
 - 'SALT AND SUGAR' p.94
 - 'WHEN YOU HATE YOURSELF FOR REVISITING OLD WOUNDS' p.99
 - 'A SONG FOR DARK SKIN' p.126
 - 'INSTAGRAM' p.127
- As part of a wider discussion, explore the societal issues and pressures that might have influenced these poems. *Do these resonate with the students? Are there any other issues or pressures they have direct experience of that have been explored in any of the other poems studied? Are there any that have not been explored that might be good to write about to speak to young people of your age? What might you want to say about these things? What messages might you want to convey? How could you convey these to an audience so that they will engage effectively in what you are saying and why? Jot these down in your poetry journal to come back to.*
- Invite students to choose the poem that they feel resonates with them most and to organise themselves into like-minded groups. In preparation for a performance reading, ask the students to reflect on why they choose this poem, what they feel is unique about it. *If you were to perform this poem, how might you do this? Would it be best performed individually, in pairs or as a group? How will you pace the performance? How will you use your voice(s) to support your interpretation? What tone will it take? Will you use any movement or action?*
- Give time for the students to build up their poems, text marking with performance notes and ideas, practising, editing and polishing to a finished performance. Before 15th June 2023, this could be filmed and submitted for the [CLiPPA shadowing scheme competition](#) to win the opportunity to perform this poem on stage as part of the award ceremony at the National Theatre.
- Allow opportunity for the students to watch, reflect on and evaluate each other's performances. *What did each interpretation add to your understanding of the poem's central theme?*
- Again, provide time and space for students to explore issues that are important to them, in their daily lives, their relationships or relating to wider world affairs.

Session 5: Poetry can inspire connection

- Start the session by discussing with the students what they have gained from the collection so far; their reflections on the themes that Nikita Gill writes about, her motivation and the audience she wants to reach and what more this tells us that we might find in this collection.
- Present the students with poems for them to read, revisit and respond to together in the ways shown, from both the 'GIRLHOOD, WOMANHOOD AND SISTERHOOD' and the 'FOR WHEN YOU NEED TO PROTEST' sections, such as:
 - 'CLAY' p.12
 - 'HYMN FOR THE GIRLS WHO COME AFTER US' p.24
 - 'AN ODE TO AUNTIES' p.74
 - 'REMINDER III' p.106
 - 'ON GOOGLING MICROAGRESSIONS' p. 107
 - 'VOTE' p.114
 - 'A MANIFESTO TO PROTECT MY PLUS-SIZE FRIENDS' p.119
- Allow students to choose those they find most memorable and talk about why, sharing their initial impressions and what resonates for them before looking more closely at and text-marking the language choices, patterns and poetic devices and the impact they have on them as readers. Encourage them to read the poems aloud to tune in to their voice and the tone of the poem. Encourage the students to consider the patterns and connections between the poems as well as within each. Consider too how they compare with other types of writing that is intended to inspire solidarity. This could lead to some extended work around different forms of protest and campaign writing, when and why they are chosen and the impact they have on different audiences.
- Invite students to choose the poem that they feel resonates with them most and to organise themselves into like-minded groups. In preparation for a performance reading, ask the students to reflect on why they choose this poem, what they feel is unique about it. *If you were to perform this poem, how might you do this? Would it be best performed individually, in pairs or as a group? How will you pace the performance? How will you use your voice(s) to support your interpretation? What tone will it take? Will you use any movement or action?*
- Give time for the students to build up their poems, text marking with performance notes and ideas, practising, editing and polishing to a finished performance. Before 15th June 2023, this could be filmed and submitted for the [CLiPPA shadowing scheme competition](#) to win the opportunity to perform this poem on stage as part of the award ceremony at the National Theatre.
- Allow opportunity for the students to watch, reflect on and evaluate each other's performances. *What did each interpretation add to your understanding of the poem's central theme?*

Session 6: Poems can uplift

- Start this session by reading aloud two poems:
 - 'HEALING IS NOT LINEAR' p.145
 - 'HOW TO HEAL FROM THE PAIN' p.150
- Now invite students to re-read and revisit the poems, responding to them as shown, by discussing their first impressions to reading with the eye and the ear, before delving into an

analysis of poetic devices and language choices and the impact they have, prompted with questions to expand their thinking as necessary:

- *How do the poems make you feel? Why? How has this been achieved by the poet?*
- *What is the impact of the poem's placement on the page, its shape and layout?*
- *What is the impact of the punctuation and line breaks or lack of? How does this affect how we read and respond to it as readers?*
- *How do the poems sound? What is their prosody and rhythm? What is their tone?*
- *What connections do we make with each of the poems; to our own lives; to other poems in the collection, other texts; to the wider world?*
- Invite students to choose the poem that they feel resonates with them most and to organise themselves into like-minded groups. In preparation for a performance reading, ask the students to reflect on why they choose this poem, what they feel is unique about it. *If you were to perform this poem, how might you do this? Would it be best performed individually, in pairs or as a group? How will you pace the performance? How will you use your voice(s) to support your interpretation? What tone will it take? Will you use any movement or action?*
- Give time for the students to build up their poems, text marking with performance notes and ideas, practising, editing and polishing to a finished performance. Before 15th June 2023, this could be filmed and submitted for the [CLiPPA shadowing scheme competition](#) to win the opportunity to perform this poem on stage as part of the award ceremony at the National Theatre.
- Allow opportunity for the students to watch, reflect on and evaluate each other's performances. *What did each interpretation add to your understanding of the poem's central theme?*
- Give the students opportunity to read further poems from the collection that are intended to reassure and encourage healing, such as those from the sections 'LOVE' or 'FOR WHEN YOU NEED TO HEAL', for example:
 - 'IN 150 CHARACTERS OR LESS' p.21
 - 'AFTERMATH' p.43
 - 'SOME LOVES END SOFTER' p.44-45
 - 'WINTER' p.95
 - 'SURVIVAL' p.96-97
 - 'THE OCEAN IN YOU' p.98
 - 'TELL ME AGAIN' p.167

Session 7: Reflecting on the collection

- To draw together all the work done in this unit, hold a discussion about the collection as a whole.
- Give students copies of the book, so that they might read and navigate as they wish, section by section, or revisit the poems that have been explored and enjoyed throughout the sequence. *What are your most memorable poems? Why? What have you learnt about poetry that you didn't know before? Would you be encouraged to read more poetry after studying this collection? Why? Why not?*

- Discuss the overarching themes that Nikita Gill addressed in this collection and how she has curated the book. What is at the heart of this collection? What is unique about it? Do they have a preference for any of the sections or any particular theme explored in any of the poems? Why might that be?
- Read aloud the Author's Note up to '...even if it doesn't always feel that way.' Do you agree with this? Do you think she has achieved her aim of wanting the reader to feel seen? Why? Why not? What kinds of thoughts or feelings has it evoked in you?
- Read aloud the last poem in the collection: 'US' on page 172. Allow the students to share their immediate responses; how they feel about this poem, their personal preferences, connections they are making and anything that puzzles them. *Why do you think this particular poem has been chosen to end the collection? Would another poem work just as well? What difference would it make?*
- Invite the students to take the opportunity to reflect quietly on the impact that the collection has had on them, what they have learned and how it might affect the way they see the world and how they themselves feel seen, as Nikita Gill hopes. Encourage them to record their thoughts and feelings in any way they like in their Poetry Journals, through sketches or jotting down words and phrases.
- Ask the students to shape their reflections and responses into a poem dedicated to Nikita Gill. It might be in the form of a social media post to reflect and acknowledge this medium as a means of publication. *What would they like to say to her? Is there anything they would like to ask? How do they want her to feel?* You might show a selection of the poet's posts on her Instagram account to gain a sense of how she herself publishes her poems on this platform.
- Give the students time to create their poems and work with a response partner to edit and polish it, reflecting on language choices and the overall effect of the poem on a reader. Encourage students to read their poems aloud and – when they are satisfied with their finished piece – to publish it with illustration to form part of a class anthology alongside a copy of *these are the words*. You could even send the poet the anthology with a covering note or letter thanking her for writing these poems for them, if not by post then by tagging her into a school social media post.

Session 8: Ideation

- Start a discussion with the students about what they like or don't like about writing. *What do they think is the hardest thing about being a writer?*
- Often, when people talk to writers about their work, one of the most commonly asked questions is where they get their ideas from. Ask students to talk in pairs or small groups to list as many places as they can think of where a person can get ideas to help their writing.
- After a couple of minutes, get students to report back and create a class list. Where can we get ideas from? Students might mention things that we see/notice as experienced in a literacy session, something heard, memories, other books or poems that we've read, a song that we heard, dreams, imagination, daydreaming, playing, films, family stories or events, opinions and arguments, etc.
- Invite the students to consider where Nikita Gill may have got ideas for this collection of poems. *What inspired or informed her? What was her motivation? Who is her intended*

audience and how might this have inspired her ideas? Consider the title ‘these are the words and what is almost an invitation ‘Fearless verse to find your voice’. Look back over their poetry journals and consider the writing that they have already done and what more they have to say; what they would like to give voice to. Perhaps they have been inspired to guide and reassure others, help them to feel seen in the way that Nikita Gill wants to with this collection.

- Visit the Poet Interviews section of the Poetryline website – there are videos available with a range of poets, including Nikita, talking about how they go about writing their poetry, how they work on their poems, what inspires them as a poet and what advice they would give to aspiring poets. On the Poet Interviews page, you can filter interview videos to look at poetry inspirations, writing poetry and working on poems. Consider first what might inspire poetry. *After watching a few videos of poets talking about their inspirations, have we got any other ideas for where ideas or inspiration can come from?* Add to the class list.
- Give the students some time either to begin to write down ideas or to sit and think about what they might write later. Some students may choose to start by drawing, doodling or sketching ideas initially. Refer back to the poet’s illustrations in the text and consider how artwork can illustrate but can often inspire the words too. They might start by jotting down favourite words or phrases or the themes and/or experiences they may wish to take forward in their writing.
- Remind the students that these journals are only for them – there’s not a particular amount of writing you expect them to do and you won’t be marking them.
- Remind them that they don’t have to start writing a poem straight away, they might just begin by collecting words, phrases, ideas and images that can be used later. However, if they have an idea that they want to start exploring immediately in a poetic form that is also fine.
- Keep notes and observations yourself during this time and model how you might come up with ideas for poems. Show the students how you as a writer come up with ideas, insights and poetic language inspired by experiences you have had, things around you or your own imagination.

Session 9: Writing Own Poems, Gaining a Response

It is important to develop students as reflective writers by giving ample opportunity throughout the writing process to talk about themselves as writers, enable them to voice their views, listen to others and develop new knowledge and understanding.

Students’ writing can be improved if they, a partner or their teacher reads it aloud at an early stage, giving it life and breath and helping the young poet see the patterns and tunes they have created. Just as an author would work with an editor, students should be given opportunities to help each other by reading their writing aloud and responding as readers. This allows them to support each other as they compose and structure their ideas. Writers can tell response partners what they are pleased with in their writing, particular devices or parts of the poem they may be struggling with and gaining a picture from the reader of how their writing impacts on them. Response partners should be encouraged to reflect on the impact of the poem on them as a reader. Students can then redraft parts of their work, based on these conversations.

- Demonstrate how you use your notes and ideas to create drafts of a poem, making additions, changes and improvements as you write.

- Read aloud your work to the students, giving time and space for them to respond to your ideas, and support them in having discussions to support you in reflecting on your work, making changes or additions and redrafting if necessary. The students may also be inspired by hearing advice from professional poets, e.g. Joseph Coelho: How do you work on your poems? — <https://vimeo.com/130341918>.
- Allow further time for students to select ideas and drafts of poems from their Poetry Journals or notebooks and to continue to work these up into poems.
- Once the students have an initial draft or drafts, allow them to read aloud their poetry to a response partner to lift the words off the page, hearing how they sound when performed.
- Give time for response partners to ask the writers questions, discuss parts they aren't sure are working or make suggestions to improve the writing. For example, writers can tell response partners what they are pleased with in their writing, particular devices or parts of the poem they may be struggling with and gaining a picture from the reader of how their writing impacts on them.
- Response partners should be encouraged to reflect on the impact of the poem on them as a reader. Students can then redraft parts of their work, based on these conversations.

Session 10: Editing and Publishing Own Poems

At the final stage of the writing process, it is important that students are given time to support each other with transcription, proof reading, looking at spelling, punctuation and grammar and consider the quality of the writing as a whole, prior to publication.

- Give further time for students to redraft any parts of their poems that they discussed with their response partner in the previous session, or to work on their poems further if they need time to do this.
- When they have a poem that they have read aloud to a partner, discussed and explored changes so that they are happy to present to a wider audience, start to think about how that poem could be best presented. *How will it look on the page? What form will it take? How will you use line breaks, spacing on the page to enhance the meaning or emotions behind your poem? Will you hand write it? Will you publish using ICT? What script or font will you choose? Will you make any specific decisions about the way certain words look or are placed on the page? Will you illustrate the poem? If so, how will the words and illustration sit and work together?*
- Allow plenty of time and space for the students to make a final draft and then publish their work accordingly.
- When they are happy with the way their poems look on the page, think about how this could be lifted off the page and be performed to an audience. Give each child a photocopy of their finished poem and allow them to mark this up with performance ideas. *Will you perform on your own? Do you need others to support you? How will you use voice, body movements and facial expression to enhance the listener's engagement and understanding?*
- Ensure time is given to try out ideas and rehearse performances of student's own poems.
- Spend some time now reflecting on the poems that the students have written. What kinds of poems were your favourite to write? What did you find it easiest to write about?

- Following this, you might hold a poetry festival for students to do readings from their collections to parents or other classes in the school or display their work as part of an exhibition, including the published poems and accompanying illustrations. For the students performing at the event, ask them to consider what they learnt from listening to the poems being read aloud and performed by other poets as well as trying out ideas in their performances of the poems in this anthology that they will need to remember when reading their own poems.
- Display the student's own poems prominently in the library or a shared area so they can be read by a wider audience.
- Ensure you obtain each child's consent before publishing their work. This might lead on to wider explorations around the concept of copyright. You may wish to draw on the resources CLPE produced in partnership with the ALCS to explore this in more depth:
<https://clpe.org.uk/teaching-resources/ALCS-resources-on-copyright>.

