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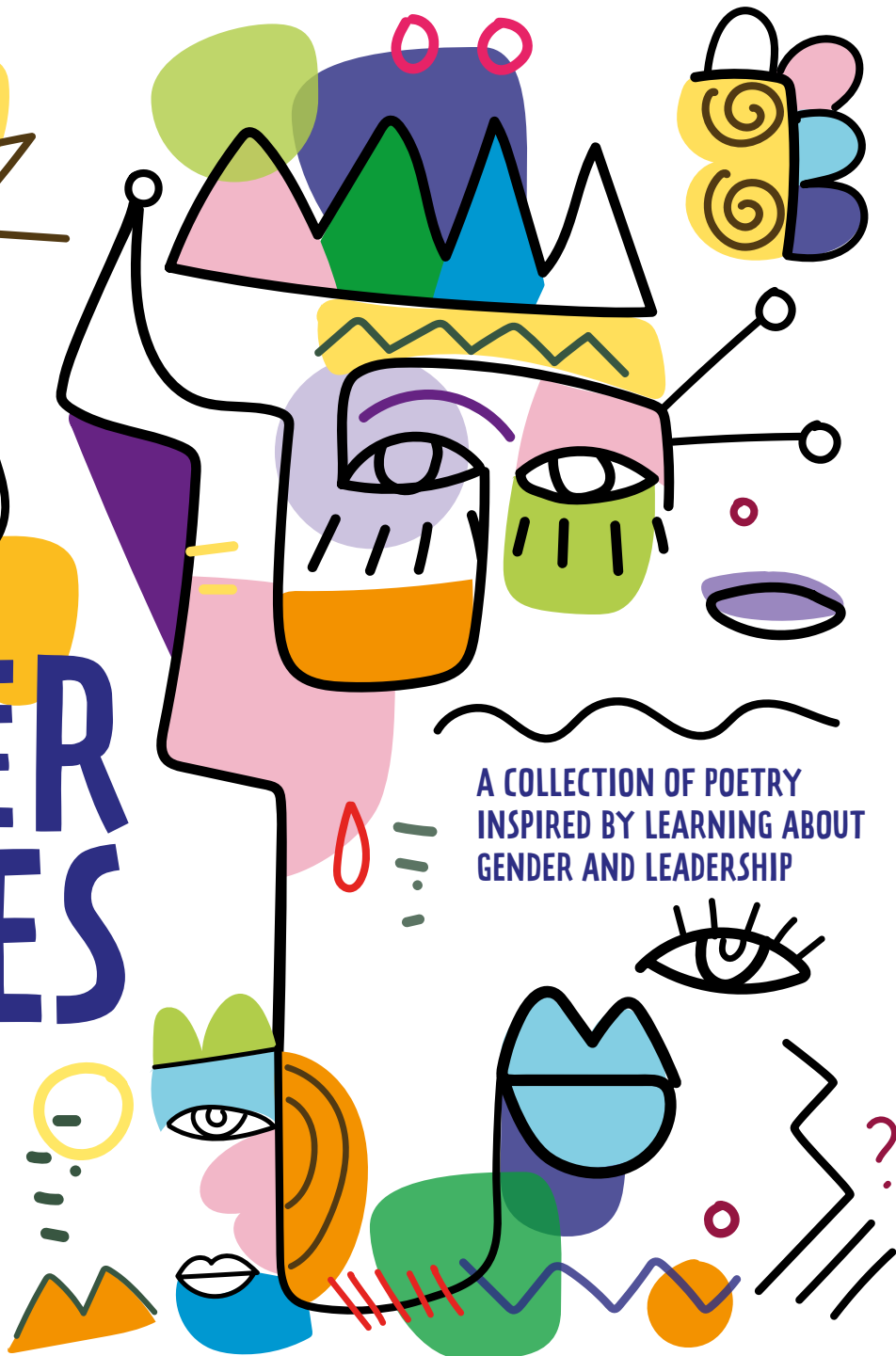
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

GENDER WRITES

Kay Fuller, Arjmand Kokab,
Sophie Potter and Claire Price (eds.)



A COLLECTION OF POETRY
INSPIRED BY LEARNING ABOUT
GENDER AND LEADERSHIP





Produced by the School of Education, University of Nottingham

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CONTENTS

Gender Writes: Young People and Leadership	1	Mannequin	20
Dukeries Academy	2	Just a Short Fuse	21
Saltley Academy	3	Stepping Out of a Cramped Car	22
WomenEd	4	My Mum Drives me into the City	23
The Poetry Society	5	Pressure	24
The Poets in Schools	6	I Come From Here (After Dean Atta)	25
The Poems	7	WomenEd Speakers	26
It All Began at the Station	8	The Teachers	27
Escape	9	The School of Education University of Nottingham	27
My Poem	10	The Project Leaders	28
My Gender	11	The Researchers	29
Who Can I Be?	12	Economic and Social Research Council	30
My Gender	13		
Women Are Always Treated Unfairly	14		
It's Ok To	15		
My Struggles	16		
Woman Enough	17		
Women's Jobs	18		
The Pain	19		



GENDER WRITES: YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEADERSHIP



Gender Writes is a collaboration between the School of Education, University of Nottingham, WomenEd, The Poetry Society and two schools in the Midlands: Dukeries Academy, Newark and Saltley Academy, Birmingham.

The project draws on Dr Kay Fuller's research and teaching.

Feminist perspectives on contemporary educational leadership (Routledge, 2022) takes a fresh look at the research with Dr Jill Berry about the first two years of *#WomenEd: A movement for women leaders in education* (2019).

The research found school leadership that was underpinned by understanding of intersectionality and commitment to inclusivity. Differences among children, staff and leaders were respected and valued. School leadership focused on promoting social justice.

Kay has always valued children's self-expression through the medium of poetry. After organising several poetry writing competitions, this project was set up as a poetic inquiry to find out what children and young people think and say about gender and leadership.

This anthology amplifies the poetic voices of children and young people who attended a talk by a WomenEd speaker and a poetry workshop as part of The Poetry Society's 'Poets in Schools' project.

All the poets have given permission for us to include their writing here.



DUKERIES ACADEMY

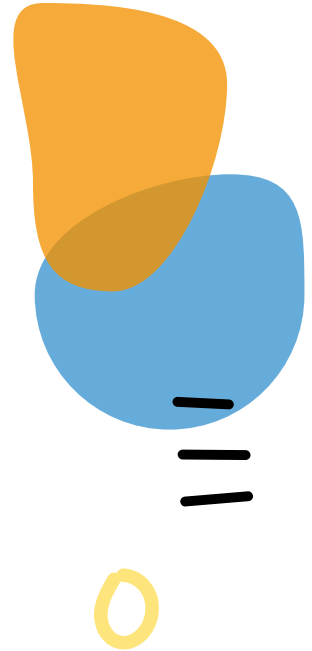
ACADEMY TRANSFORMATION TRUST

The Dukeries Academy vision is to inspire excellence and maximise opportunities for all. As a high performing academy, at the heart of the Ollerton community in Newark, Nottinghamshire, the academy supports every student to achieve the qualifications they need to progress confidently to the next stage of learning, training or employment. That is not all. To complement their qualifications, they also develop the skills and attributes which will allow students to become positive change makers in their own and other people's lives.

The team of talented staff are friendly and professional, fully committed to the education, pastoral needs and well-being of children. The Dukeries Academy aspires to act with integrity, is ambitious in its purpose and resilient in pursuit of excellence. A fully inclusive approach provides a strong foundation for every child's learning, whilst giving them the opportunity to explore and find out who they are and helps them set ambitious goals for their future.

The academy is passionate about innovative teaching with a focus on continual improvement. They have exceedingly high expectations of the community in terms of attendance, punctuality, uniform, behaviour and outcomes. Consistent high standards ensure that Dukeries students are both happy and successful during their time at the academy.

They work with families to ensure that children receive the world class education they deserve.



SALTLEY ACADEMY

WASHWOOD HEATH MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST

Saltley Academy is a special place. It is proud not just of examination results, but also their commitment to valuing each individual/pupil, celebrating all the cultures of their city and country and being the best pupils can be.

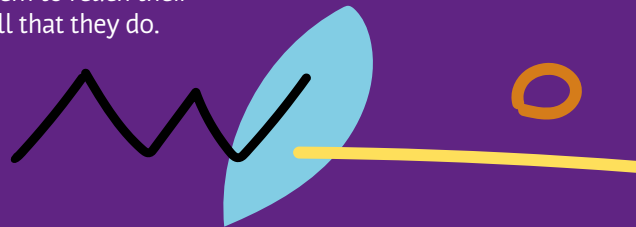
Saltley Academy provides outstanding learning opportunities for pupils, in a safe and caring environment. Pupils feel that they belong to the school, have a voice and are treated equally. Being a member of Saltley Academy transforms lives but the lives of the Academy community. Working alongside other schools and institutions, they inspire pupils to be outstanding, life-long learners, who are also taught and guided by the inspirational staff at Saltley Academy.

With the skills and personal qualities required for a happy and successful life and career, Saltley Academy prepares pupils for adult life, as respectful and responsible citizens in multi-cultural Britain. In a school where real success is recognised and celebrated, Saltley has the highest expectations for academic progress and personal standards. They encourage pupils to believe in what they can achieve. Providing every opportunity possible for them, they aim to be a shining example of excellence in teaching and learning.

At Saltley Academy, pupils know that they have the support and guidance of dedicated staff, who will inspire them to reach their true potential, and will help them to excel in all that they do.

Their 'Academy Pledge' as a Rights Respecting School is as follows:

"Saltley Academy is founded on the principle of all respecting the dignity and rights of each and every individual. Respectful relationships are at the core of this learning community, which will enable our young people to respect all whom they meet and to understand and develop the skills they need to embrace the responsibilities of being an outstanding learner and an active, contributing and content citizen."



WOMENED

WomenEd is a global grassroots movement that connects aspiring and existing women leaders in education and gives women leaders a voice in education.

The movement began in 2015, when co-founder Helena Marsh's original blog on @Staffrm asked 'What glass ceiling?' She had recently attended a conference about women and leadership. The conversation continued and evolved into a network with, in 2022, almost 45,000 Twitter followers worldwide.

People who engage with WomenEd hold formal leadership positions as (executive) headteachers, senior, middle leaders and teachers in educational settings from early years to higher and adult education.

They influence education as school governors, trustees and directors, consultants, and academics. They are also parents and university students.

Online and offline WomenEd events have been organised in various regions of the UK since 2015. Regional and country networks are in Australia and many countries in Europe, North America, the Middle East and North Africa.





THE POETRY SOCIETY

The Poetry Society is one of the UK's most dynamic arts organisations, championing poetry for all ages. Through its Poets in Schools programme, The Poetry Society has been placing poets in schools for over 50 years. Among its innovative education and commissioning programmes, events and competitions, highlights include: the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award, Young Poets Network, free downloadable PoetryClass resources, and teacher-poet network, Cloud Chamber.

THE POETS IN SCHOOLS

Jodie Russi-Red is a Hull-born writer, poet, occasional broadcaster and creative producer.

She won the Sid Chaplin Prize at the Northern Writers' Awards 2020 for her autobiographical short story collection: *The Finest Carrots Are Grown in Nottingham* and was writer-in-residence at Durham University 2020-2021. In 2019, she was published in Kit de Waal's *Common People: An Anthology of Working-Class Writers*.

She regularly writes about the intersection between working class culture and greenspaces in the urban North and after creating 'Grow & Tell' in 2021, a project that reimagines and reconstructs underused community gardens as places to write and read poetry, she is now producing a podcast series about women and allotments for the BBC.

Jasmine Gardosi is the Birmingham Poet Laureate. She is a multiple slam champion, beatboxer and winner of the Out-Spoken Prize for Poetry. Her work exploring identity, LGBTQ issues and mental health has appeared on Button Poetry, at the Tate Modern, Glastonbury Festival, Symphony Hall and across BBC Radio. She was featured on Sky Arts' BAFTA-winning show *Life & Rhymes* and her poem about the pandemic, filmed on a rollercoaster, was broadcast across America on PBS.

She is a previous Writer in Residence at the Brontë Parsonage Museum, Poet in Residence at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and BBC Arts Young Creative. Her poetry/beatbox/Celtic dubstep show *Dancing To Music You Hate* exploring gender identity was commissioned by Warwick Arts Centre and premiered to standing ovations. She recently performed extracts of her show with the BBC Symphony Orchestra at Symphony Hall, which was broadcast on BBC Four and is now viewable on iPlayer.

THE POEMS

Children and young people responded in writing to their learning about gender and leadership.

Both schools focused on learning about gender diversity, intersectionality (the way 'race', ethnicity, religious and sexual identities work with gender) and inclusion.

At Dukeries Academy, the leadership learning was focused on speaking up about things that matter to children and young people. At Saltley Academy, the leadership learning was about the Nolan principles for public life (Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership).

Headteacher speakers, Julie Cassiano and Andrea Stephens, introduced the topics in their talks at the school on behalf of WomenEd.

Poets, Jodie Russi-Red and Jasmine Gardosi, developed the themes in half-day poetry workshops.

Children and young people were not restricted to these topics in their poetry writing. However, you will see that, among other things, they have written about their feelings, gender identities and women's experiences.

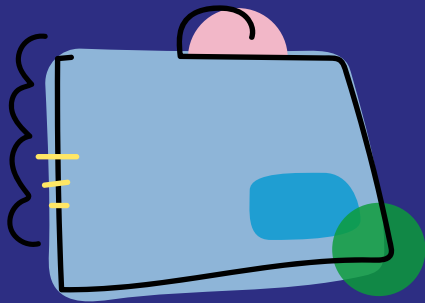
We hope you enjoy reading their poetry.

IT ALL BEGAN AT THE STATION

It all began at the station
Where everyone was in their own little world
Living their dream
Like the man with the weight of his music
On his back
Or the women with the makeup that is
Like a portal into another world
A world I want to be in

A world where all my dreams come true
A world where all my baggage can fit in one luggage
A world finally where I find the perfect life I so long for
A perfect life where I can travel, earn money, and paint
till my heart's content

But in this world, I'm on my way to my first adventure
America
A large country where I could go anywhere
At any time at any moment
I can be me there
I can be me anywhere
But I must start somewhere



However, as I pass, I catch a glimpse
Of a journey to come beneath me
A journey covered by clouds like a shield
To protect the treasure beneath

Although my journey starts here
The excitement will not diminish here
It can only grow now

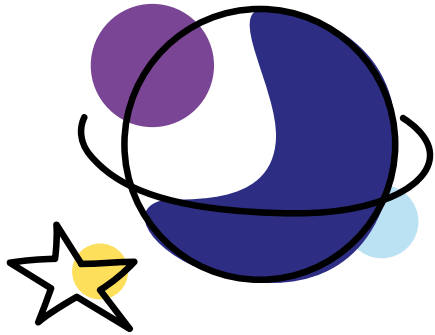
I didn't know me
They did
They knew when I was hungry
When I started walking
When I was sick
When I was happy
What made me happy
What made me sad
They knew me

The first person in my life
The one I was attached to for 11 months and 10 days
before I was forcefully taken out
she has always been there
she was my first leader

She was the one who has an accounting degree
but wanted to be a fashion designer
she was the one that left to protect us
but she got a criminal record in return
she was a leader

He was like a father to me

BY **DEMMY FANAWOPO**



ESCAPE

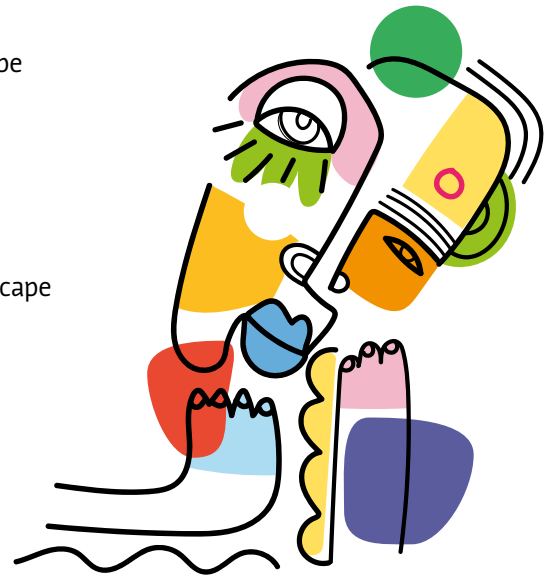


When you're feeling overwhelmed
And life just won't take a break
When you're straight in from school
And there's homework progress left to make
When it all feels like a bit too much
Just stop

Stop for a minute
Don't be afraid to just wait
Hold back the river of things to do
Who cares if they're late
What matters right now is you

Sit back, relax, stick on a playlist, escape
Fly through your thoughts
Like you're up in space
Not a care in the world
Show the joy on your face
Set free from your worries
Take the world at your own pace
Sometimes what you need is just to escape

BY ISAAC LITTLEWOOD



MY POEM

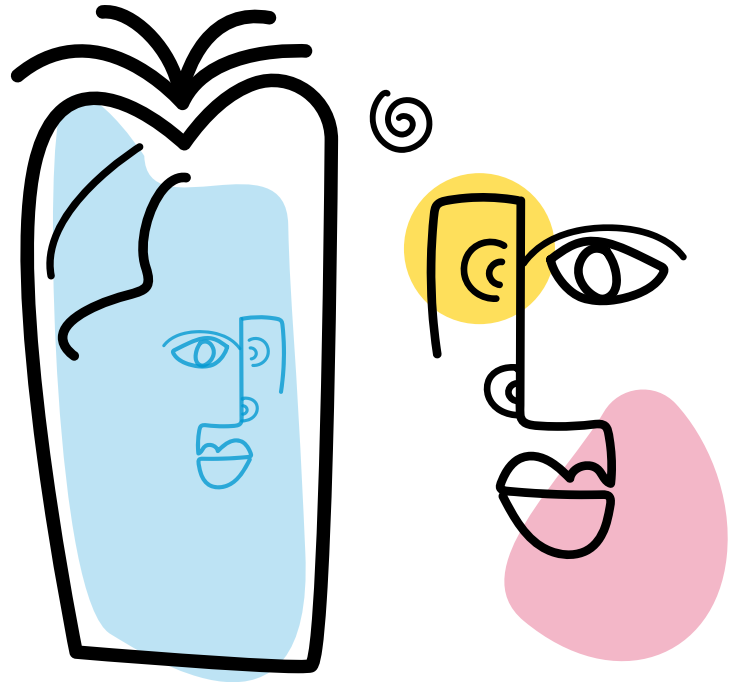
No peace, no rest,
You're weak get help,
Make food, clean up,
Look in the mirror, wake up!

Do you wish for things to change?
Do you wish for people to make you feel okay?
Do you want to be free?
Do nothing every week?
Hear the same every day?
You think you're going insane?
Don't want to feel this way?

Tough, toughen up,
Life never is enough.
Iron my clothes, why are you so slow?
Why are you so lazy? Hurry up and say it.
You don't understand, how much I can do,
Cook, clean and polish shoes too,
What do you do? Work for ten hours and come home?

Whereas I am very capable of what I own,
And if you don't already know,
I deserve freedom than stay at home!

BY INSHA



MY GENDER

To me, my gender is like a flower
Beautiful and delicate.
My gender feels like a complete puzzle,
All the pieces match up
My gender is music, all the beats are right
My gender is powerful and strong
But,
Why is it seen as weak?
It's seen as a toy, only used for
entertainment
It's like a road, always driven
on, with no second thought
My gender is like a flower, there
to be looked at
But
My gender can be anything, strong or weak,
It doesn't define how I work

BY **WILLIAM SAAMIA JOYA SHAKESPEARE**



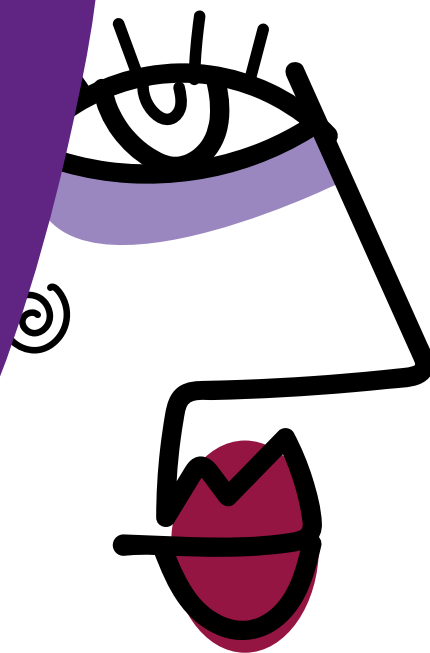
WHO CAN I BE?

I'm walking down the road,
In my shoes with their ribbon bows.
I'm only going to the supermarket,
Yet I find myself making such a fuss,
Over my hair and my make-up and my clothes.

You could say I'm worried,
Maybe even panicked.
But I wouldn't blame it on me,
I would blame it on your standards,
That I cannot meet.

Is this all I can be as a woman?

By **EVE JACKSON**



MY GENDER

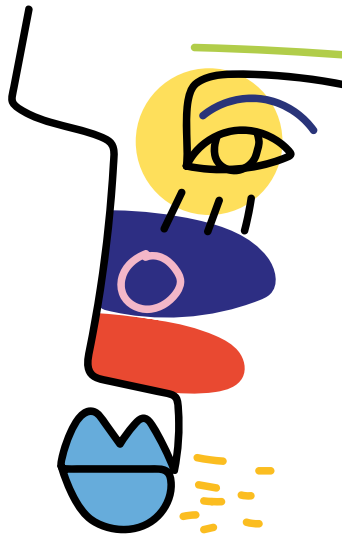
Sometimes I feel trapped as a female.
My gender is like a storeroom - has lots inside
But is only seen to have one purpose.

I am tired of being stereotyped.
I am tired of being told what I can and can't do.

What's wrong with being me?

My gender is like a door; it is strong
And leads you to your next
Destination.

By **SUNDAS BIBI**



WOMEN ARE ALWAYS TREATED UNFAIRLY

This happens on a daily basis
Must they always do chores?
Even so they have hopes and dreams
No one can stop them not even you

Must you always turn away?
In your reflection is how you are
Right now, you turn away
Right now, you should see the real you
And how you have true potential inside of you
Run that's all you do now. It's time to see you for you.

By **LINA**

IT'S OK TO

It's ok to laugh about nothing,
Because you find that laughter comforting.
It's ok to smile in the morning,
Even though other people are boring.

It's ok to feel that anger when you're alone,
Because you're not sure, where is your home?
It's ok to cry and yell and scream,
As you don't know how to boost your esteem.

It's ok to want to be that girl,
Because after all, you do love her curls.
It's ok to fancy that boy,
Even if his actions annoy.

By **EVE JACKSON**



MY STRUGGLES

It's anxiety
It's over-exaggeration
Never being able to get out of your own head
Learning to breathe and becoming steady

It's panic despite all of the happiness
It's pushing limits
Never letting tiny factors affect my breath
Learning to burn boundaries

I wish it was easy, but it's not
I wish it was making choices without considering the consequences, but it's not
Never escaping through words
Learning to leave your nails alone

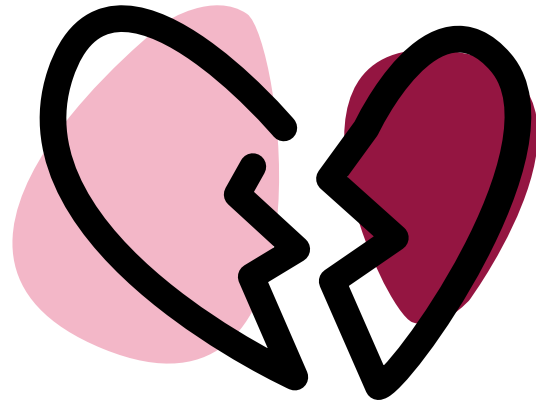
It's being you
It's never stopping at the sight of fear
Never letting it stand in your way
Learning to go for what you want and breathing in the process

It's love
It's heartbreak
Sometimes you need fear

People ask if you're okay and immediately you say "I'm fine"
Why did you do that?
What were you thinking?
Deep down you know you're dying inside
Pushing, pushing and pushing it away
Never ever telling a soul
They say the opposite will be the best for you
Asking for help has never seemed more daunting
It's judgement
It's your worst nightmare

That's my struggle

By **GEORGIA LANG**



WOMAN ENOUGH

People's expectations are
louder than a drum being played.

The sun has been led away.
But my hands are tied

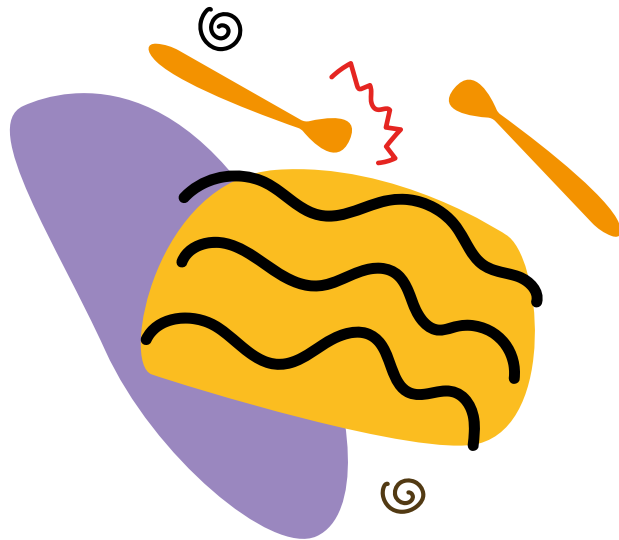
back from doing things I
want to.

And I should be nothing but
ashamed.

I'm always stuck.

And that's because
I'm not woman enough...

By **SHANUM TANVEER**





WOMEN'S JOBS

Women can do whatever they want

On an everyday basis they are told to cook and clean

Must they listen to ungrateful people

Every day they should live with a goal

No one controls what they work as

By SAABA

THE PAIN

The pain
The anger
The frustration
The loneliness
The experience of heartbreak will always hurt
left in the dirt
Some will grieve in different ways
some will daze
As it all builds up
It is life or death
Will they cope or not
As they build their confidence
All by themself yet again
Hoping for someone to come along and pick the pieces back up

By **JACK SLATER**



MANNEQUIN

“Don’t talk”

- You’re told

“Don’t dress like that”

- You’re told

“Lose weight”

- You’re told

“You’re too stupid”

- You’re told

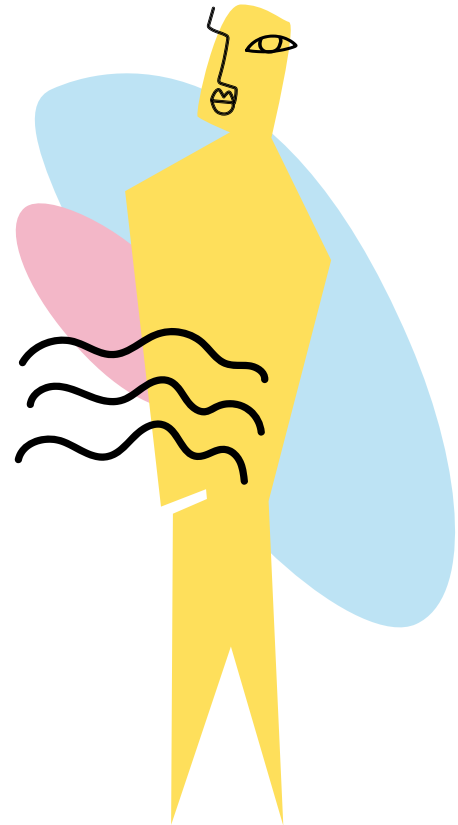
“You’re useless”

- You’re told

But it’s never

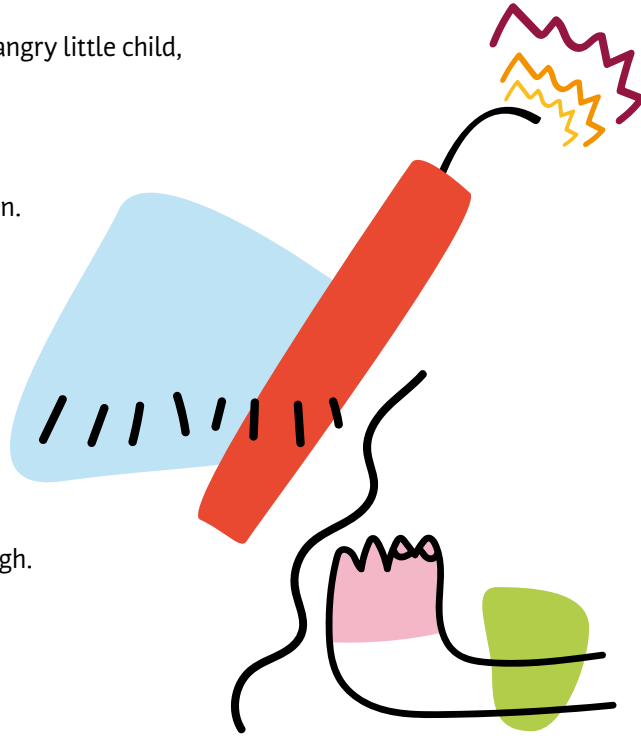
“You’re enough”

By **MARIA BARGAONU**



JUST A SHORT FUSE

People tend to look at me,
And think, “ooh, they seem nice!”
But deep below, buried down far, I’m just an angry little child,
With big thoughts and little output.
People telling you you’re wrong,
For things you’ve known all along.
Them telling you it’s just opinion,
Even though your thoughts are your dominion.
Shouting,
Arguing,
Screaming, “I know this is right!”
Life always throws me curveballs,
And I take them with a smile.
But deep down, buried below,
I just wish I could hit life with a car.
I wish I was calmer,
But instead I have a short fuse.
Wishing people would believe you,
Telling them all the things you’ve been through.
If they’d just shut up and listen,
They’d see the tears glisten.
And so you keep feelings pushed down,
Hoping one day,
Somehow,
They’d be found.
Coping is never easy,
But try not to cause a feud.
Try to smile through life’s hardships,
One day it might get easier for you.
Just try and keep pushing through.



By **ROWAN B**

STEPPING OUT OF A CRAMPED CAR

Stepping out of a cramped car,
onto the cobbled roads of Plymouth,
I see my mum's smile widen as she sees her family smiling widely back at her.
I see those that people call 'goths' and think, "what a beautiful soul".

Stepping onto the sand,
the sea flooding my senses,
I grin and relax
I am home.

By **ROWAN B**



MY MUM DRIVES ME INTO THE CITY

My mum drives me into the city,
“I don’t want to be home too late so no wandering”,
But that’s all I want to do,
Wander around and watch girls I wish I looked like do everyday things,
Like buying a coffee and doing their work in the corner of a dimly lit cafe,
It’s like when you walk past lots of shops and each one carries a different scent,
That’s the thing everyone here can be different,
You’re not a weirdo if you wear something other than a grey Nike hoodie, black leggings and white Airforce,
The buildings are taller than the sky,
They guard me from my problems,
A bullet proof wall to the people who try to shoot me down day after day,
Eventually my mum tears me away,
We get in the car,
My throat feels tight and my eyes start to sting,
My head against the window thinking “don’t cry, don’t cry, don’t cry, don’t cry”
Why would she be crying, her mascara is practically swimming round her cheeks,
Bit weird,
To you it’s just driving home,
But to me it’s being kicked out my home,
It’s like I’ve been picked up and chucked in a field of pigs and cows,
But one day I’ll venture back
X marks the spot of home
But it feels like I lost my map somewhere along way,
But you’ve got your map,
It’s the same route you walk home every day,
It’s that feeling when you walk through your front door,
And your skin is warm,
And your heart knows your home,
For me that feeling is stepping off the train at St Pancras Station,
“Please mind the gap between the train and the platform”
Oh yeah I’m home

By **MAISIE CALLER**



PRESSURE

The overwhelming feeling
Of pressure building up on my back,
The want for perfect 100% results
will never last
I cannot overcome the
Sadness I am filled with,
When I do not excel in exams or tests
I sometimes wish I could just put it all to rest
The comparison I am faced with
On a day-to-day basis,
Makes it harder to fail
But all they say is “Inhale...” Exhale...”
Instead of revising
I find myself hiding
From the constant fear
That I wish would just disappear
The thoughts of the future
Have never felt sooner
Then the start of this year
All this of an Inspector and Shakespeare
Will never help me no matter how much I hear

By **EBONY HANCOCK**

I COME FROM HERE (AFTER DEAN ATTA)

I come from loud music
I come from the sound of joy and cheer
from the sound of everyone else's loudness
from motorbikes roaring down the streets
I come from fighting and arguing

I'm from the trees I climb
hearing my mum shout:
"Get down, there's no time!"

From too much maths being discussed at the dinner table
from the sound of calming music

From the carpet in a book shop
with the books I collected on my way round
and found
a comfortable corner to bury my head in

From glitter
and sparkles
and childhood joy

I come from mountains I was never quite tall enough to reach
I come from hours of scratched CDs
I come from my mum's too hot cottage pie

From bitter relationships and broken promises

From waiting for finally being told I am loved
and meaning it

I come from empty blank space
a place
of new beginnings

By PUPILS AT THE DUKERIES

WOMENED SPEAKERS

Julie Cassiano is Headteacher of a primary school in Northampton. She has had wide teaching and leading experience, having started her career in London. She became a Deputy Headteacher in Leicester, and now works in Northampton. Julie thoroughly enjoys writing about what she has learnt or observed in practice. She has contributed chapters for two published books, has spoken on several podcasts and has written for Nexus Education. Julie has recently completed an MSc in Educational Leadership and intends to complete a PhD within the next 5 years. Julie is a member of WomenEd East Midlands.

Andrea Stephens has taught for around twenty-five years across seven schools. Having gained success in middle Leadership as Head of Department at King Edward VI Camp Hill Girls, a grammar school in Birmingham and then Bromsgrove School, a co-educational independent school, she sought her first senior leadership post at the RSA Academy in Tipton. She remained there for nine years as Assistant Headteacher before moving to Stoke Park School and Community Technology College, in Coventry. She has fifteen years of senior leadership experience, most recently three years as Co Acting Principal and Vice Principal at Ninestiles, an academy in Birmingham. She is currently combining her headship at Colton Hills Community School in Wolverhampton with doctoral study.

Leadership, for Andrea, is about making a difference and inspiring others to do the same. She is committed to improving social mobility and driving the equality agenda. Her education was in a diverse state comprehensive school, and she owes her current success, drive and passion to the inspiring teachers and leaders she encountered along her path.

In preparation for becoming a Headteacher, she was accepted onto the Future Leaders programme. Future Leaders connected her to a network of aspiring headteachers, HMI, Ofsted inspectors and experienced headteachers who provided insight and bespoke leadership training. Having an extensive network of support such as Future leaders, WomenEd West Midlands, and reading helps to keep her informed of changes and the wide-ranging aspects of education.



THE TEACHERS

Michelle Cleaver is an English Teacher at The Dukeries Academy with a first-class honours degree in English Literature. She has taught English in secondary schools for about 15 years and her mission has always been to ensure that she spreads the ethos of equity, equality, inclusion and diversity to students. She is a keen feminist and believes in raising the profile of equity and inclusion. Literature is a great vehicle for this and she loved seeing the students engage with the Gender Writes project. She found it truly inspiring.

Anisah Shaban is an English Teacher at Saltley Academy with a degree in English Language. She has been teaching for 4 years and is constantly learning new ways in which to look at the world through her interaction with the pupils. As a Muslim woman who works in an inner-city school, she believes it is essential to teach young people of the value they each have regardless of their differences. She believes it is crucial to draw upon our life experiences in order to help make the world a more accepting place. Working on the Gender Writes project with her pupils provided her with great hope for the future.

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

The School of Education welcomes students, scholars and other partners into a vibrant global community. The School works globally through the international campuses in Malaysia and China and innovative courses for undergraduates and postgraduates. It works locally through partnership schools, professional networks and diverse communities.

Education research seeks to understand ‘what works’ in education, and how educational practices and policy can be improved. These concerns are located within a broader set of questions around ‘what matters’. What is the role of education in contributing to a more fulfilling, richer, and socially-just quality of life, both for individuals and society?

THE PROJECT LEADERS

Kay Fuller is an associate professor of educational leadership at the University of Nottingham. She is a former English teacher, head of English and deputy headteacher having worked in five comprehensive schools in the West Midlands. She is a former initial teacher educator and school governor. Her research focuses on women, gender and feminism in educational leadership. Since 2015, she has supported WomenEd, as regional lead for the East Midlands, by organising and speaking at events on and offline and by researching the movement with co-researcher Dr Jill Berry. With Jill's permission, she has written about WomenEd in her most recent book *Feminist perspectives on contemporary educational leadership* (Routledge, 2022).

Claire Price has been a member of WomenEd since the beginning. For a while, she was the network lead and only member from Wales! Luckily, she has now passed the baton on to an energetic team of leaders who work in Wales. Claire is currently one of the team of leaders for WomenEd England and supports the West Midlands, East Midlands and Southwest regions. Claire is passionate about feminism, about fighting for social justice and about amplifying the voices of and providing a platform for the very talented group of younger female leaders in education, especially those who have multiply diverse characteristics.



THE RESEARCHERS

Sophie Potter is an assistant professor of education at the University of Nottingham, teaching primarily on the MA in Special and Inclusive Education. She was previously an English teacher and Head of English in secondary schools for young people with special educational needs. She is currently completing her Doctor of Education (EdD) degree. Her research aims to champion the voices of children and young people, and centres on the topics of inclusive pedagogy and practice, inclusive behaviour support practices, the influence of academisation on inclusion, and the theories of Pierre Bourdieu. During her first degree in English and Creative Writing, she developed a love for reading and writing poetry, and continues to attend a monthly poetry night. Sophie is a research assistant for the *Gender Writes: Young People and Leadership project*.

Arjmand Kokab is a secondary English teacher with interests in postcolonial texts and works of Eastern heritage writers. Arjmand also teaches on the MA in Educational Leadership and Management programme at the School of Education, University of Nottingham, focusing on critical approaches to pedagogy and leadership. Her PhD research centres on exploring socially just teaching and leadership in multi-ethnic learning communities. She is interested in practices that shape the curriculum for English as culturally responsive to the needs and interests of BAME learners in UK schools. She enjoys reading poetry that expresses cultural identity and is interested in the use and effects of poetic devices in Eastern folk tales. Arjmand is a research assistant for the *Gender Writes: Young People and Leadership project*.



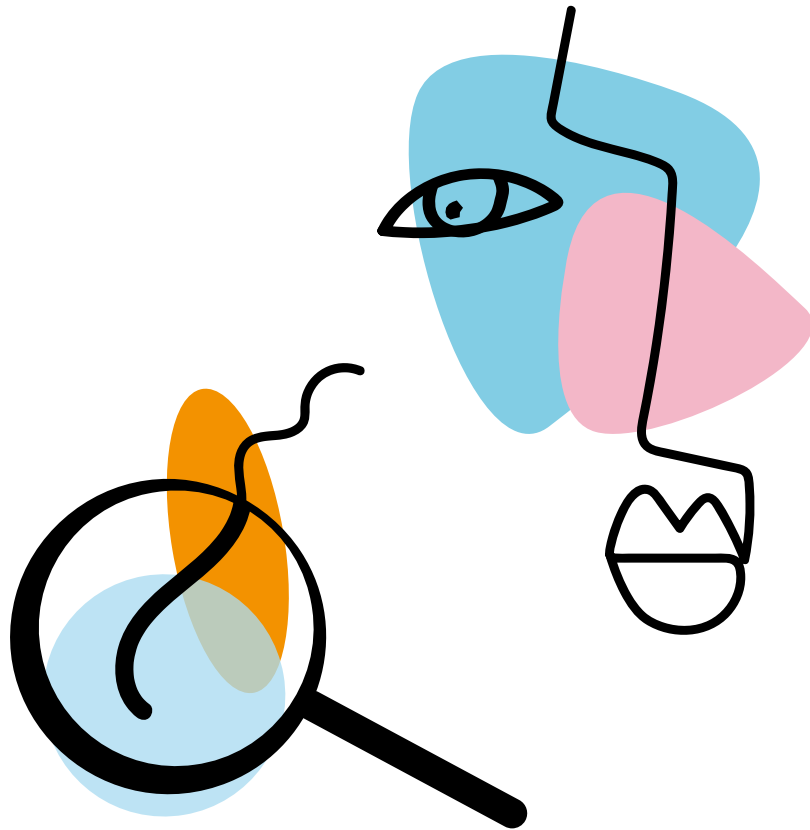
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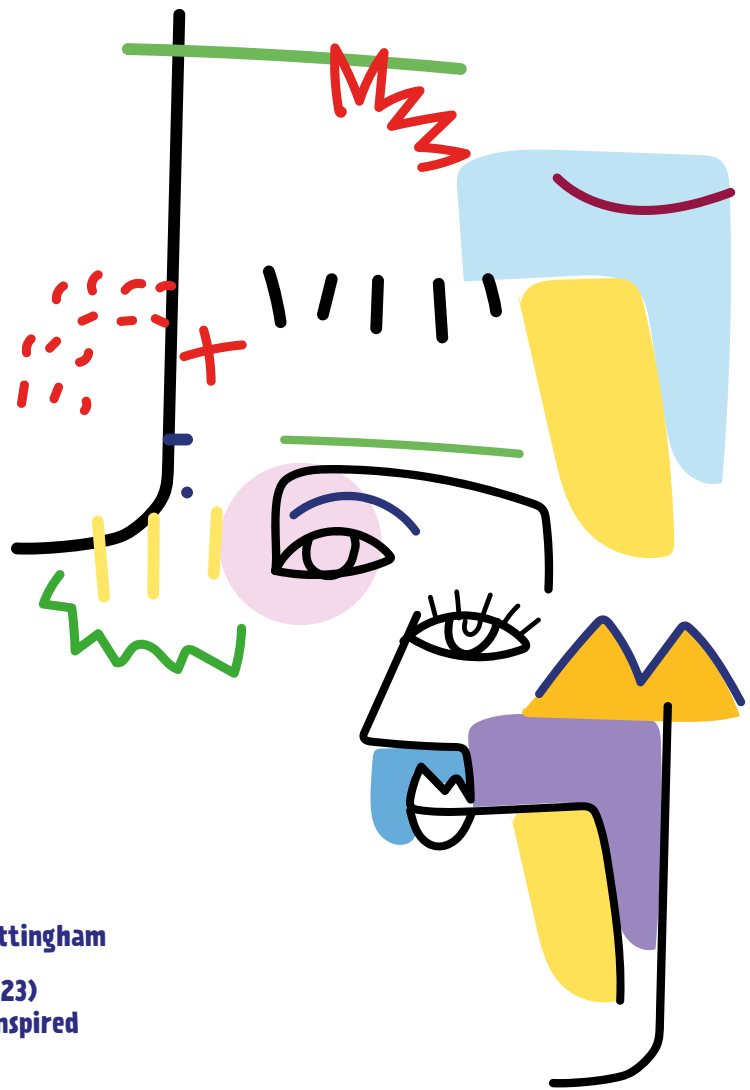
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