



## RISING STARS RESOURCES

### *Superpowers by Ruth Awolola*

*When we're late to school  
And we're running down the street,  
I tell him he's the fastest man that I'll ever meet.*

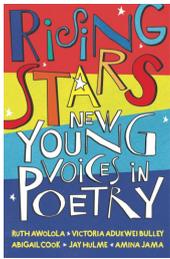
In her poem, Ruth describes her character's parents as leaving the kids to clean the house and care for themselves, and finally says they must be **invisible** as their parents never really see them. It's a very moving poem.

### Task

- 1) Read the poem. How does it make you feel? How do you think the narrator and their brother feel?
- 2) Think of different superpowers - what are they useful for? What superpowers might be useful for you in your home life (e.g. invisibility, silence, cooking and cleaning powers, cheering people up)?
- 3) Write a poem in which you (or a character) have super powers, but instead of being the usual superpowers like flying or shooting webs from your fingers, your superpower is something that tells us about your (or your character's) home life.



EXTENSION: Look at the **form** used by Ruth in her poem - what do you notice about it? When you write your poem, try using the same form, or change it slightly to make your own.



## RISING STARS RESOURCES

### *On Forgetting That I Am a Tree* by Ruth Awolola

*A poem in which I fear I did not dig into the past,  
Did not think about my roots,  
Forgot what it meant to be planted.*

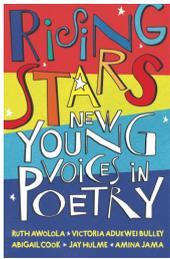
Ruth compares herself to a tree in this poem - saying that she is undervalued but still essential, that her roots (history) are deep, that she is her own home, that she is self-sufficient and that she can provide shelter for others. This poetic device is called a **metaphor** (when we say we are something else, for example: "*I am a rock*").

### Task

- 1) Read the poem, or watch Ruth perform it:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3zvKHCxgfs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3zvKHCxgfs)
- 2) Pick out the ways in which Ruth describes herself as being a tree. How does she build up the metaphor?
- 3) What would a good metaphor for you be? Think of your own or choose from the list below:  
rock tree tiger lion ocean wind music fire
- 4) Create your own metaphorical poem describing yourself as the thing you have chosen - think of the different aspects of the thing, and use them to build up your own metaphor.



EXTENSION: **Why** might Ruth be using the metaphor of a tree? And why might she have **forgotten** she was one? Why is it important she has now remembered?



## RISING STARS RESOURCES

### *Afro Hair Haiku* by Victoria Adukwei Bulley

*My hair shrinks when wet,  
like pine cones in the autumn  
waiting for their time.*

A **haiku** is an ancient Japanese form of poetry in which three lines are divided between 17 syllables, like this:

1st line: 5 syllables  
2nd line: 7 syllables  
3rd line: 5 syllables

Traditionally, haikus are written about the seasons but in this poem Victoria writes about hair from the perspective of a young black woman.

### Task

- 1) Divide up the poems stanzas and look at them one by one. If doing this as a class, you could divide these between small groups. Count the syllables in each line - do they fit the pattern of a haiku?
- 2) What does each stanza tell you about the narrator's hair? How do you think she feels about her hair? Why?
- 3) Think of something that is important to you, like the poet's hair is important to her. It could be something that is a part of you or something you own and treasure. You can choose from these examples, or think of your own:

Hair   Sari   Hijab   Shalwar Kameez   Skin   Turban   Lips   T-Shirt   Trainers

- 4) Create an everyday haiku about the thing you have chosen. Remember to keep to the syllable count!

EXTENSION: Victoria has created a poem out of five haikus. See if you can do the same for your chosen thing - maybe even make it longer!

You can also see a video of Victoria performing her poem here:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlgALlqjqE8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlgALlqjqE8)



## RISING STARS RESOURCES

### *Strange Dusts* by Victoria Adukwei Bulley

*The free papers it carries  
will call it  
foreign - this air*

This is a poem which uses the **metaphor** of 'desert dust' to talk about migration, making us think of the humanitarian crisis in which millions of people have been uprooted from their homelands by conflict or hunger. In her poem, Victoria writes that the 'wind knows / no such thing / as nations', reminding us how silly our idea of borders is.

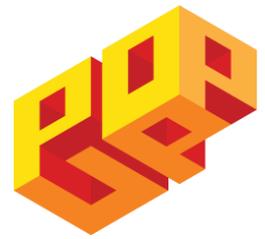
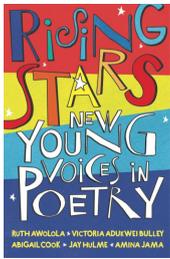
#### Task

- 1) Start with a group discussion about where people are from, and where their families are from. Some people might have lived in different countries, or their parents or grandparents might have. Discuss what this means to them.
- 2) Read the poem together - it could be nice to read around the group, like the wind described in the poem moving between people.
- 3) Discuss the metaphor of 'desert wind'. What is it describing? What does it make you think of? What different attitudes towards the 'wind' are shown in the poem?
- 4) Think of another metaphor that could be used to describe migration (use the earlier discussion to influence this). What concepts can describe the journey of migrants, or refugees, and allow a reader to feel sympathy for these nationless people? Some examples are below, but it's even better if you can make up your own:

Wind   Birds   Scents   Water   Pollen

EXTENSION: Compare *Strange Dusts* with another of Victoria's poems from the collection, *This Poem Is Not About Parakeets*. What different attitudes towards migrants are shown in the two poems? How do they make you feel towards people who have come from other countries, because of reasons out of their control?





## RISING STARS RESOURCES

### *My Body* by Abigail Cook

*I have planted vines that wrap up my arms and  
around my thighs.  
One day I will teach my children to climb them.*

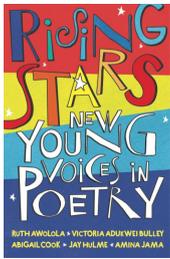
In this poem, Abigail explores her feelings about her body through **metaphors** that relate the different parts of her body to nature. She describes her ribs as a bird cage, her hair as the ocean, and her freckles as stars in the galaxy. She repeats the line, 'my body is the garden I grew up in', and later writes, 'I am learning to let my garden grow', showing how her feelings about her body have changed over time, as she comes to love herself for who she is.

### Task

- 1) Read the poem, or watch Abigail perform it here:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxxJ75HH\\_Ok](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxxJ75HH_Ok)
- 2) Pick out the metaphors Abigail uses to describe the different parts of her body. If you like, draw the body she describes, with waves for hair, bird's wing shoulders, and a mountain for a back.
- 3) Think of the environment you grew up in. Did you have a garden, like Abigail, or did you grow up in a busy city, or peaceful countryside? Make a list of things from the environment that could represent parts of your body, for example, your teeth could be made of tower blocks, your skin could be the pavement you walk on, or your eyes could be summer lakes and your skin could be freshly planted fields if you lived in a rural area.
- 4) Take the metaphors you have created and turn them into a poem about your body. Experiment with the imagery you use and see how you can make the reader feel through your writing.



EXTENSION: Try reversing the metaphor, and describe an environment using parts of the body.



## RISING STARS RESOURCES

### *You Are The Ocean* by Abigail Cook

*You are everything,  
you are waves  
and tides  
and ferocious.*

The character described by Abigail in this poem is related to the ocean. In five short stanzas she describes different aspects of their personality and how it relates to the contrasting characteristics of the sea, being shy yet ferocious, gentle yet powerful. She writes in the second person - 'you' - repeated at the start of each stanza, directing the poem at the subject.

### Task

- 1) Read the poem. What does it make you feel about the character it describes? Which lines or words make you think this? How do you think the poet feels about this person?
- 2) Think of a natural element that could describe you. You might choose:  
Wind Fire Sun Earth Air Ocean River Moon Hurricane Tsunami  
Or choose something else!
- 3) Note down some of your characteristics that relate to the element you have chosen, e.g. you might laugh often, sounding like a babbling river, or a light Autumn breeze.
- 4) Create a short poem from your notes. Start your poem with 'I am the...' and then describe why you are like that, what you do as your element (both positive and negative) and what gifts you bring.

E.g. *I am the sun  
I bring light and joy to  
everyone  
I meet  
though sometimes people hide from me  
my temper is hot  
I will bring warmth to your coldest afternoon*



EXTENSION: Collect in all the poems and then give everyone a new one. See if they can find who wrote it!



## RISING STARS RESOURCES

### *This Border* by Jay Hulme

*I wished they'd teach me  
what stands before me,  
what types of mystery lie ahead.*

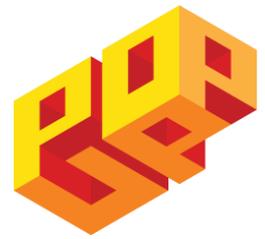
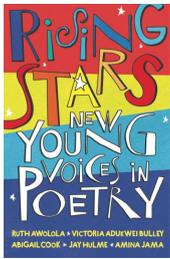
In his poem, Jay talks about walking with ghosts, as though his ancestors are always walking beside him and guiding him through his life and all of his decisions.

### Task

- 1) Who are your ancestors? What do you know about them? What questions might you like to ask them? How do you think they could help you if they existed as ghosts?
- 2) Read Jay's poem - how does he feel about his ancestors/ghosts? What does he want from them? Do they give it to him?
- 3) Think about what ghosts would walk with you through your life. Imagine the life of one such ghost, create their whole character. How could this ghost help you in your life? Perhaps it is the ghost of a very famous person who walks with you, perhaps it is a relative of your family, or a great great great great GREAT grandmother? Imagine what they look like, what century they were born in, what happened to them, what clothes they are wearing.
- 4) Turn this description into a poem, describing the 'ghost' and showing how they help you (or don't). You might also want to create **atmosphere** in the poem, using words like:

Cold   Misty   Thunder   Eerie   Chill   Transparent   Night   Moon

EXTENSION: Look at the form and rhyme scheme Jay uses in his poem. Can you use a similar structure for your poem? Or make your own, but stick to it?



## RISING STARS RESOURCES

### *Community* by Jay Hulme

*It's amazing what you see,  
looking in from the dark.  
You see a myriad of people  
and in every one, a heart.*

Jay describes the people who lived on the street he grew up on in this poem, showing how even though he 'never met anyone / I knew for sure was a neighbour' he still felt a sense of community with the individuals and families he saw through their windows, noticing their patterns of behaviour with a sense of nostalgia and intimacy.

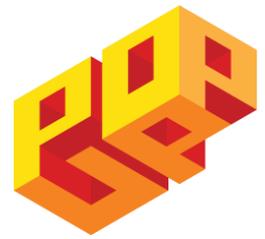
### Task

- 1) Where do you live? Who are your neighbours? Draw a diagram of the street you live on, or the block of flats you live in, or your area, and write notes about the people you know live there too - even if you just know a few details! Share your diagrams in pairs, or discuss some as a group.
- 2) Read Jay's poem. What does he notice about the people who live on his street? How does he feel about them? What does he mean by the word 'community' and in what ways does he feel it or not?
- 3) Imagine the lives of all the people in a building or street unfamiliar to you. For example, you might draw a picture of a tower block and select four windows. Now imagine who lives behind each of these windows. Is it a single mother with two small children? Is it a rabbi or an imam or a priest? Is it the home of a young child who will grow up to be a world famous singer? Let your imagination run free.
- 4) Create a poem about your imagined building or street, describing the people who live there, and their habits.



EXTENSION: Use your diagram from the start to create another poem about the street or building you live in, and your neighbours. Does this make you want to know more about them? Do you feel a sense of community with them?

Watch a video of Jay performing another one of his poems, *I Thought I Was Small*, here: <http://bit.ly/2B2Sk7c>.



## RISING STARS RESOURCES

### *Recurring Dream* by Amina Jama

*A balloon following  
me around the  
house. My family  
sitting talking loudly.*

In this poem Amina tells us about a dream she has had repeatedly since childhood, in which she is followed by a balloon and no one in her family can hear her or see her. She uses the balloon as a **metaphor** for feeling separated from everyone she loves.

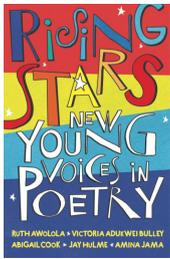
### Task

- 1) Read Amina's poem. In a group, turn it into a short comic strip, with each of you illustrating one or two lines.
- 2) Have you had a recurring dream? Or a particularly memorable dream? It may be about a personal fear you have, like falling. Or perhaps it is about feeling unsafe - for example, you are being chased by monsters or massive dribbly-jawed spiders. Maybe it's something to do with running but never getting any further away from your dream danger? Either write a description of your dream, or sketch out a quick comic strip.
- 3) Write a poem about that dream, and try to resolve it at the end. For example, if your dream is about being chased by monsters, you could sit down with them at the end and listen to their problems over a hot cup of tea. If you're falling, maybe you sprout wings just before you hit the ground.

EXTENSION: Lots of people think dreams have meanings. What do you think Amina's dream *means* for her? What do you think your dream *means* to you? Might it be telling you something? Or letting you know something about yourself?

You can also see a video of Amina performing her poem here:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKvf4EHZX6U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKvf4EHZX6U)





## RISING STARS RESOURCES

### *Pray* by Amina Jama

*May you open up your chest  
and let the winter out.  
May the glass in you never shatter.*

Amina writes a poem in the shape of a prayer, where she wishes only good things to the person she is directing the poem at. It's a very thoughtful and gentle poem. If it were a noise, it would be a quiet and careful noise.

### Task

- 1) Read Amina's poem. Who do you think is being spoken to? What words or lines from the poem make you think that?
- 2) Think of someone you would like to send a positive prayer to. It could be a member of your family, a friend, or someone you have never met (for example, someone who lives in a country where there has been an earthquake or a flood).
- 3) Make a list of all the good things you would wish for them. In the list you should include all the things and feelings that would make the person feel good, or help them to have a much better life.
- 4) Turn your list into your own prayer-poem. Begin the poem with (or think of your own):

May you have... I wish for you... A prayer for... A song for...

EXTENSION: Find the **metaphors** in Amina's poem. Why do you think she uses them? What do they mean? Make some of your own and add them to your prayer-poem.