

## **Fly The Flag Anthology**

### **Poems for KS4 and N5 English Literature and Language**

*To be used in conjunction with the Teacher Resources PDF*

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These poems were commissioned for Fly The Flag and written in response to Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. All of the poems commissioned in 2020 can be found on [www.flytheflag.org.uk](http://www.flytheflag.org.uk)

## SOMETHING ISN'T RIGHT

by Casey Bailey

Something isn't right, the smell of fried  
dumplings creeping through the house  
Isn't sweeting me like I know it should,  
Like it normally would. Today is one  
Of those days, where I sit at a table  
With more seats than bodies and wonder.  
Here where bowls and bellies trade  
places, full to empty, empty to full.

Something isn't right, there are bins  
filled with food and stomachs void  
of it. There is life spilling through our  
Hands, lost to waste. Lost. Wasted.  
How could there be food at the landfill  
and lands filled with those who starve?  
It's written down, but does it stand up?  
If we stand down, is it just a write off?

Something isn't right, I can feel it  
In my gut, I am sick to my stomach  
But this is not my hunger. This growl  
From a fully feed mouth doesn't even  
Register next to that of an underfed  
Child, a mother making milk, a vessel;  
Empty, abandoned, when the words on  
provide comfort for the comfortable.

Something is wrong, we know this.  
It is flat tyre on our car, a broken bulb  
In the light as we search for freedom  
From want and fear, it is clear that  
Those cages still exist. We can write  
About rights, but those two rights don't  
Make a solution. Food for thought  
Is a privilege that nourishes nothing

Without action.

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Commissioned by Birmingham Rep for Fly The Flag

Watch on YouTube

<https://youtu.be/z-u0hSikJf0>

## CARROT SOUP

by Vanessa Kisuule

I've been thinking about carrots  
Specifically when a carrot stick  
bends to the stubborn will of teeth,  
Also, big up carrot soup  
its thrifty thrills and the latent sunset  
splatters it leaves on the walls.  
Count all the ingredients on one  
hand, do what you like with the other.  
There is bread or your scalded tongue  
as cutlery, excavate the smooth  
Ceramic, eat until your gums gleam  
And Netflix asks if you're still here.  
I'm so glad you're still here.

I've been thinking about how  
a basic bag of carrots never  
costs more than a pound, how fresh  
veg is a fetish for the Waitrose  
shopper who voted Green once,  
when they were 18 and had  
an asymmetric bob. They have an  
allotment now, a barbed fence  
round it to keep chancers out.

I've been thinking about  
Chantennay carrots and purple carrots,  
All the bent, forked and bulbous  
Carrots humming their fetid stink  
in landfill, their only crime  
being knobbed like our knees,  
whiskered and wrinkled,  
Their cute but fatal tangents  
in size and colour

I've been thinking about my mum  
Who is also your mum, telling us  
if we eat every bit of our boiled  
carrots, we'll see in the dark  
like a superhero.  
Somewhere in a Reddit thread  
A man claims he ate so many  
his skin now glows like a  
Halloween lantern. We are  
all fed lies, on both sides of  
the bread line.

I've been thinking and thinking  
and thinking about the cans  
of peas and mushrooms and

sweetcorn stacked in the food  
banks where people on the dole  
And in scrubs line up  
for something no one should  
beg for in the sixth largest  
economy. Do you how many  
carrots I've thrown out simply  
because they were bendy,  
A little grey, mere hours  
Past their prime?

I've been thinking about what  
You find in a bag of carrots,  
Traces of soil and sunlight,  
The ghost of hands that  
pulled them up from the dark,  
callused fingers we label  
foreign, the bag we mark  
'Lovingly Grown in Britain'

I've been thinking about that shitty  
Guy with shampoo ad hair who  
never called me back and how  
even he deserves carrots.  
And the man doing 25 to life,  
him too. The girl who bullied  
you in year 5, the homeless guy  
Throttling a beer can, my lovely  
friends and everyone one of their  
Sworn enemies, yes, they all  
deserve carrots. To grow  
them or buy them and eat them  
In ribbons or coins, leave  
them out for Santa's reindeer,  
to blitz them into something hot  
enough to scare the frost away.

I've been thinking about you.  
And how, if I could, I'd  
Invite you round. You could  
Sit by me and we'd have carrot  
Soup. We could talk as we eat  
or sit in silence. Mop our chins.  
Lift our spoons, greet the  
our goofy clones staring  
back at us.

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Commissioned by Fuel for Fly The Flag

Watch on YouTube

<https://youtu.be/gflaFi7dt2U>

## **ROOF**

### ***After Kei Miller***

by Cecilia Knapp

The night is kind  
from the right side of the window.

Low grey cloud rolls over itself,  
till the rain falls in sheets.

On my back, my belly is full enough.  
I look up to the white rectangle above,

the neighbour's feet softly overhead,  
frying onions perhaps,

this small heaven I pray to  
in the cold blue park of morning.

Beside me, he sleeps like a dog.  
I think of my dad's red hands,

working late, his roll out bed,  
how close we have been to the edge.

Outside, the streets are named after men  
who did bad things.

I run my taps, brush my lucky teeth,  
holding the foam in my mouth

until it burns, holding  
the edges of the sink.

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Commissioned by Live Canon for Fly The Flag

Watch on YouTube

<https://youtu.be/tNGSumIbU4A>

## A SMALL NEEDFUL FACT or MARCUS RASHFORD AS MORE THAN FOOTBALLER

*after Ross Gay*

By Amina Jama

for the first time, in my living history,  
the entire world stopped, for one reason.  
i think, perhaps, we will be stopping  
forever now, pondering on loss.  
stuck between tiers and decisions  
out of our control.

for yet another time,  
elected officials voted yes  
to starving families. billions set  
aside for the nuclear we never asked  
for, but it took a 23-year old  
to campaign, to become organiser,

chosen government official,  
leader. a small needful fact  
is that you cannot furlough children,  
it is impossible to complete workbooks  
on an empty stomach. as in human rights

as in article 25, how do you enjoy  
life when so many components  
are missing. a 23-year old  
took it upon himself to provide,  
faced backlash, *why don't you feed  
the poor? why don't they stop  
having children? why don't they save?*

as in disproportionate, as in lock-down,  
as independent business are hit,  
forced to let go. as in still opening  
their doors. somehow, forever,  
for us, community replaces  
government. that says it all.

as government / as in provider / as in community / as in we live in a world where officials vote yes to  
starving families / as in a 23-year-old campaigning / as in backlash / as in lock-down / as in i lived off  
free-school meals too / as in extend / as in think of the bigger picture / as in your cannot furlough  
children / as in there is no time for workbooks on an empty stomach / as in disproportionate / as in  
human rights / as in article 25 / as in enjoy / as in twitter / as in community / as in businesses / as in  
failing / as in uniting / as in if those who we elect will not provide we will / as in a 23-year old  
campaigning / as in we live in a world where officials vote yes to starving families / as in we vote no /  
as in open doors / as in packed lunch / as in it doesn't stop here

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Commissioned by Stratford Circus for Fly The Flag

Watch on YouTube

<https://youtu.be/Wy1-Da5xrtM>

## **GREEN HOODED SWEATSHIRT**

by Wayne Holloway-Smith

Praise the front door clicked shut on its tiny hinges  
I know my daughter  
will come striding through to open up my aloneness  
in her baggy green hoodie – step right through it with her singing  
big kid trainers on  
and her protein-based confidence everything will be ok  
it's allowed: suddenly breathing and Netflix the universal  
truth is I love her and it's loud – praise the tomato stew happening now  
at great volume here all over her plate and peas crunched up  
in her calcium-thick teeth – a little dinner  
down the front and also on the elbows or sleeves  
of her green hoodie and it's OK – I love her –  
and OK on the hoodies of her school friends irrespective  
of the colour – praise the science of what goes into their mouths  
metabolising so strong their bodies are expanding into their own  
playtime grown in the trees they are climbing  
outgrown the old books they recited  
with energy maths equations cartwheels  
somebody once told me every good piece of literature  
needs agony a little struggle in it something sad perhaps hunger  
it's OK I'm hungry and I'm sung  
only for the good things nowadays  
my daughter – we are in our pyjamas  
sat down in the knowing it's allowed:  
children all over the city are cleaning their teeth  
are getting tucked in – praise their beds  
full on the music of their sleeping and all over the city  
the bodies of parents are lighting up like chicken shops  
washing machines humming their concentric colours  
– none of which are leaking

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Commissioned by Fuel for Fly The Flag

Watch on YouTube

<https://youtu.be/PLfq5wnSblg>

## The Empty Table

by DL Williams

*English transcript of captions for BSL poem*

A table of every colour and hue  
surrounded by people, laden with food,  
unfortunately subjected to autocratic rule.

Taking offence

for one reason                      Is your race different from mine?                      Get out!

or another                              What religion are you?                              Get out!

valid or invalid                      Are you disabled?                              Get out!

fair or not

   Are you queer?                              Get out!

   Are you a mother? Is that your child?                              Get out!

   Where's your husband?                              Get out!

logical or not

they fear the other.                      Hey you – do you have a job?                      Get out!

   Did you just cough? Are you sick?                      Get out!

   Are you deaf? CAN YOU HEAR ME?                      Get out!

   What did you say?! YOU ARE SO WRONG                      Get out!

Until eventually...

There was no-one left.

The table emptied:

no-one to bring food, no-one to share.

No winners

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Commissioned by Fuel for Fly The Flag

The original poem in BSL can be viewed here <https://youtu.be/eXQi819tvCU>

## **FLYING THE FLAG**

by Keisha Thompson

How can I make this flag fly?  
I stick it in the ground but it isn't enough.  
The fabric hangs down like a blue bottle on the last day of summer.

I ask it if it is hungry.  
Lay out a banquet of luxurious grapes, blueberry flapjacks and acai tea.  
The blue fabric stays limp like a deflated balloon on an empty dance floor.

I ask the flag what it represents.  
A footprint could be symbol of someone running away from something or towards something, it can be a foot walking on water or a foot jumping so high it leaves an unmistakable mark on the belly of cloud!  
The blue flag stays still and cold like a kiss from pneumonia.

I ask if feels sick.  
Look for signs of a fever. I take it inside. Spread it over the radiator. Stroke the fabric as I tell it ancestral stories of flags long-gone. Ancient royalty of an Indian subcontinent. Blue dragons in triangles embroidered with gold fringing. Yak tails. Dynasties. Vengeance. Battle cries. Black silk. I speak until I am blue in the face.

you're right  
I've been silly  
flags have no  
time for words  
they are purely  
concerned with  
symbolism. how  
can I make it fly?  
how can I make  
it feel welcome  
to unfurl? some  
say flags look like  
axes. built to be  
seen as a threat.

I believe flags are more than fabric. when a flag flies it helps us to see the invisible. I hoist it over my shoulder. go outside. hold it up to the wind. and run like I'm chasing a dream I do not have the words for.

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Commissioned by Fuel for Fly The Flag

Watch on YouTube

[https://youtu.be/HJCrYT8\\_w\\_Q](https://youtu.be/HJCrYT8_w_Q)