

KEY STAGE	AGE
KS1	5-7
KS2	7-11 ✓
KS3	11-14 ✓
KS4	14-16
KS5	16-18

AT A GLANCE

- THE BODY
- MEMORY
- DANCE
- DRAMA
- TED HUGHES

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POETRYCLASS: FRESH IDEAS FOR POETRY LEARNING FROM THE POETRY SOCIETY

PHYSICAL POETRY

BY JOHN SIDDIQUE

Very often poetry is dealt with as a pursuit mostly for the mind. The physicality of poetry, of memory and emotion, are often put on one side. This exercise uses my poem *fiftyfirstsecond*, but as an alternative, Ted Hughes' poem *Hands* from 'Moortown Diary' would work well. Both poems are very physical and tell a life story.

Flexibility

This piece would be suitable for Year 9 or 10, and possibly a group other than top of English; perhaps a drama or dance group would work just as well. It is probably an activity for more imaginative students.

Stimulating ideas

After reading the poem, you could ask the students to write something of their own life story, each line matching a mark or observation about their own hand. If you have a very brave group, you can get them to work in pairs working with each other's

hands, or they may tell the story of their mother or father through their hands. Whichever way you choose it is good to work with the idea of someone they know well.

Keep it real

Tell the students that there is no need to make anything up. They should tell the truth and try to feel the memories of what it is they are trying to say in the head, the heart and the body part they are focusing on, before writing anything down.

POET'S TIP

Try to put across the idea of lingering physical memory, for example, not wanting to wash your hand if it's touched something you want to remember forever.



FIFTYFIRSTSECOND

the heaviest hush
clothes become transparent
fruit washes down
hair plastered to face
arms holding myself
arms not reaching far enough
arms touching tree bark
drops on fingers
bigger feeling/extra texture

arms cold with wet cloth
 with goosepimples
 hearing the noise cut down the traffic
 with the itch of eczema cooled

arms trying to keep a man dry
 wiping water and salt
arms thinking of lost sons
 a court case
 a miscarriage
 and one other
arms against law
deep in the kidneys
shopping bag plastic holds and cuts 3 fingers
arms walk home
 ask tree of life
 ask tree of knowledge
arms feel the headache coming
in waves with the sound
each sound hurts
in the spine and the mind
arms cover my head
arms cover my head
 pump petrol

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they bear the arms of initiation
carry tattoos of many fingers
dry elbow skin against nylon
forgot to get cream

arms ask in rituals for a god
 in their muscle lines a totem
 in their nerves an idea of how to see

arms rubbed dry with towel
 stiff in all their holding
arms rest on table
 talk their own way
 won't stay hidden

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