Ukrainian – Holding on to Memory and Hope through Story and Metaphor

Year Group: Key Stage 3 & 4, S1–4

Poetry has the power to capture memory and feeling. Especially during times of trauma, poetry can help to freeze time for a moment so that whatever is happening can be thought about, held on to, made sense of. Since the day of the invasion in February 2022, many Ukrainian authors have turned to writing poetry.

In this worksheet we’ll be taking inspiration from these poems by two Ukrainian women writers and activists whose poetry has become a necessary lifeline for many during the current war in Ukraine.

Town of Childhood by Iya Kiva

місто дитинства – батьківська рукавичка
на його відбитках у пам’яті
майорять всі п’ять пальців

In the opening lines of this short poem by Iya Kiva, the poet describes the town of childhood, the place we were born and grew up in, as a parental glove, onto which our memories are imprinted. All five fingers, she tells us, wave or flutter like a flag.

Think about the town/city/place that you were born and spent your early years in. If you had to describe that place as a piece of clothing, what would it be? A scarf? A coat? A stiff suit?

Extend your metaphor by fully imagining this garment. What material is it made from? Whose stiching is embedded in it? What colour(s)? Is it loose or tight fitting? Comfortable or itchy? If this item of clothing were to have a life of its own, or move on its own accord, how might it behave?

Now look at the rest of Kiva’s poem and see if you can write your own Town of Childhood poem using metaphor to explore your memories and feelings about this place.

A Comeback Story by Viktoriya Amelina

In the opening verse of ‘A Comeback Story’, Viktoriya Amelina introduces us to four children, each having to leave their home to flee the war. In the first line of the poem:
Коли Міра виходила з дому, взяла намистину з шкатулки

Amelina tells us that the first child, Mira, takes a bead from a box with her when she goes.

The second child, Tim, takes a pebble from the street:

Коли Тім виходив з міста, підняв камінчик на вулиці

If you had to leave home suddenly and could only take one thing with you to remember your home by, what would it be? Why?

Imagine the thing that you take with you - a photograph, a teddy bear, an ornament, a flower from the garden... – is like a seed that you can plant in the new place that you are going to. How will it grow? What will it become?

**Turning memory into metaphor**

The fourth child in *A Comeback Story* Vera, takes nothing. ‘*I will be back soon,*’ the child assures herself.

Think of something you have lost, something that was important and precious to you but that you know you won’t get back in a physical form. Make a list of words that come to mind when you think about that thing that you lost. Not only words that might describe what it was like but also words that tell why it was special to you.

Now choose a few words from that list and construct a short pocket-sized poem of no more than three lines - one that can fit on the size of a Post-it note. Title the poem with the name of the thing that you lost.

Now look back at Amelina’s poem and see what each of the three children did with the thing they took with them, and what the poet learned from Vera, the fourth child who took nothing.