



## Speak up

Students explore how words can help process feelings of anger and helplessness – and bring about self-empowerment and social change – by reading poetry about racism, police violence and disability. They then write their own work about power and privilege.

# Speak up

## AIMS

- To understand the importance of listening and speaking up to achieve change
- To explore poems highlighting the impact of human rights being denied
- To write a poem expressing your perspective on power and privilege

## HUMAN RIGHTS FOCUS

Right to equality, dignity and safety

## YOU'LL NEED

PowerPoint, speakers and internet access

Paper, pens and highlighters

Whiteboard or visualiser

Notebooks or folders (for students to keep their poetry in)

## Poems

Serve and Protect by Anthony Anaxagorou

Dear Hearing World by Raymond Antrobus (audio on PowerPoint)

## STARTER

Read *Serve and Protect* by poet Anthony Anaxagorou to the class (slide 2). Share that Anthony started writing at the age of 14, and at the age of 17 entered and won a Poetry Slam competition.

Allow time for students to discuss their thoughts, before asking:

- Tell me about the poem
- What do you think about the title? (*Serve and Protect* is the motto of the US police force)
- What do you like/dislike?
- Did you notice any patterns? Pace? Rhythm?
- What experiences/message is he trying to convey?
- What do you think the poet's experience or point of view is?
- Does it trigger any feelings in you?
- Do you relate to anything in the poem?

In this poem, he refers to:

- police racism and excessive violence in the United States today;
- the case of white supremacist Dylann Roof, who shot dead nine black church members during a Bible study in Charleston, South Carolina, USA in 2015. After his arrest, it was reported that the police bought Dylann a Burger King (if you're white and have just murdered/nine praying African Americans/we'll even buy you a Burger King).

Have the students heard about the case? Discuss the following:

- Why is it relevant to the message the poet is trying to make?
- Who holds the power and privilege in this case?
- What message is sent when people are treated differently?
- What is the impact on the people involved?
- Who can change this situation?

**Teacher note** Hundreds of people are killed by the police every year in the United States – there are no firm statistics because the federal government does not collect this data. However, according to *The Washington Post*, 963 were killed by police in 2016, and unarmed black Americans are five times more likely to be shot and killed by police officers than unarmed white Americans.

Dylann Roof was found guilty of the racially-motivated murders and sentenced to death.

The victims were: Reverend Clementa Pinckney, the pastor of the church and a state senator; Cynthia Hurd, a library manager; Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, a pastor and speech therapist; Tywanza Sanders, a recent graduate and barber shop employee; Ethel Lance, an employee of the church; Susie Jackson, a retired long-term church member; Reverend Depayne Middleton-Doctor, a retired minister; a

retired teacher and newly appointed minister; Reverend Daniel Simmons, a pastor.

See: [www.itv.com/news/2017-01-11/charleston-church-shooting-who-were-the-victims](http://www.itv.com/news/2017-01-11/charleston-church-shooting-who-were-the-victims)

### ACTIVITY 1

Share and listen to Dear Hearing World, Raymond Antrobus (slide 3). In this poem, Raymond intimately shares his experiences as a deaf person with lines such as 'deaf voices go missing like sound in space and I have left earth to find them.'

Give students the time to reflect on what they've read, before asking:

- Tell me about this poem
- What do you like/dislike?
- Did anything puzzle you or feel familiar?
- Did you notice any patterns, pace, rhythm?
- What experiences are they trying to convey?
- Does it trigger any feelings in you?
- Do you relate to anything in the poem?

Listen again to the poem, asking students to make a note of one or two things that the poet is angry about. Share notes and record them on the board.

Ask students to listen again and list one or two things that the 'hearing world' could change.

Discuss ideas and ask: how could we make this change happen?

### ACTIVITY 2

Distribute paper, pens and highlighters.

Explain to the class that they will take part in a free-write to get their thoughts out and to come up with ideas for a poem. Show slide 4.

The poem will be a comparison poem to Dearing Hearing World addressed to a person or group of people who the students feel have more power or privilege than them, eg Dear Adult World, Dear Government World.

A free-write means they are free to write without worrying about structure, rhyme, spelling or grammar. It's liberating – they just need to let their thoughts out.

Emphasise that they should just write what they think. Point out that this is their own work and they won't be asked to share it.

For this free-write:

- Ask them to pick the person or group they will address.
- They must write non-stop for three minutes. Their free-write should begin 'Dear...'
- They can write the first thing that comes to their head. The main thing is to carry on writing for the full three minutes.

Emphasise that they should just write what they think. Point out that this is their own work and they won't be asked to share it.

Afterwards, ask:

- How did it feel to spend three minutes writing?
- Was it difficult or easy?
- Did they manage to write for the entire time?

Ask them to highlight any key phrases or words in their free-write that they like or feel surprised by.

Now ask students to use their ideas to compose, draft and edit a short poem.

While students are writing, create your own poem on the board or using a visualiser so that they can see you being a poet at the same time.

Ask if anyone would like to share their poem with their class.

Ask students to add their poem to their book or folder with their growing anthology.

### **EXTENSION**

Invite students to create a response poem to Serve and Protect or Dear Hearing World, or write their own poem. They need to write as the person in the position of power and privilege and say how they can make the situation more equal for the person or group being discriminated against.

## SERVE AND PROTECT

By Anthony Anaxagorou

*'Because white men can't police their imagination  
black men are dying.'* – Claudia Rankine

If you're selling CDs, we'll shoot you.  
If you're eating sweets, we'll shoot you.  
If you ask us for assistance, we'll shoot you.  
If you're minding your own business, we'll shoot you.  
If your tail light is broken, we'll shoot you.  
If you do nothing, we'll shoot you.  
If you try breathing, we'll choke you.  
If you're African American, we'll shoot you  
and the world will bury you in hashtags  
and Facebook updates and felt-tip placards  
whilst we reload.

but if you're white, we'll restrain you  
if you're white, we'll follow procedure  
if you're white and have just murdered  
nine praying African Americans  
we'll even buy you a Burger King.



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POEMS



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## DEAR HEARING WORLD

By **Raymond Antrobus**

I have left Earth in search of sounder orbits, a solar system where the space between a star and a planet isn't empty. I have left a white beard of noise in my place and many of you won't know the difference. We are indeed the same volume, all of us eventually fade. I have left Earth in search of an audible God. I do not trust the sound of yours. You would not recognise my grandmother's Hallelujah if she had to sign it, you would have made her sit on her hands and put a ruler in her mouth as if measuring her distance from holy. Take your God back, though his songs are beautiful, they are not loud enough. I want the fate of Lazarus for every deaf school you've closed, every deaf child whose confidence has gone to a silent grave, every BSL user who has seen the annihilation of their language, I want these ghosts to haunt your tongue-tied hands. I have left Earth, I am equal parts sick of your "oh, I'm hard of hearing too" just because you've been on an airplane or suffered head colds. Your voice has always been the loudest sound in a room. I call you out for refusing to acknowledge sign language in classrooms, for assessing deaf students on what they can't say instead of what they can, we did not ask to be a part of the hearing world, I can't hear my joints crack but I can feel them. I am sick of sounding out your rules – you tell me I breathe too loud, and it's rude to make noise when I eat. Sent me to speech therapists, said I was speaking a language of holes, I was pronouncing what I heard but your judgment made my syllables disappear, your magic master trick hearing world – drowning out the quiet, bursting all speech bubbles in my graphic childhood, you are glad to benefit from audio supremacy, I tried, hearing people, I tried to love you, but you laughed at my deaf grammar, I used commas not full stops because everything I said kept running away, I mulled over long paragraphs because I didn't know what a "natural break" sounded like, you erased what could have always been poetry (strike that out). You erased what could have always been poetry. You taught me I was inferior to standard English expression, I was a broken speaker, you were never a broken interpreter, taught me my speech was dry for someone who should sound like they're under water. It took years to talk with a straight spine and mute red marks on the coursework you assigned.

Deaf voices go missing like sound in space and I have left earth to find them.

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Dear Hearing World by Raymond Antrobus © Raymond Antrobus. Originally published in Issue 1: August 2016 of The Deaf Poet Society and Stairs & Whispers, D/deaf/Disabled Writers Write Back published by Nine Arches Press, March 2017.