



Amnesty International

RESOURCE SHEET 5a

Selection of poems

Freedom

by Langston Hughes

Freedom will not come
Today, this year
Not ever
Through compromise and fear.

I have as much right
As the other fellow has
To stand
On my own two feet
And own the land.

I tire so of hearing people say,
Let things take their course.
Tomorrow is another day.
I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.
I can not live on tomorrow's bread.

Freedom
Is a strong seed
Planted
In a great need.
I live here, too
I want freedom
Just as you.

© Langston Hughes (*The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, Alfred A Knopf Inc, 1994)



Amnesty International

RESOURCE SHEET 5b

Selection of poems

The True Prison

by Ken Saro-Wiwa

It is not the leaking roof
Nor the singing mosquitoes
In the damp, wretched cell.
It is not the clank of the key
As the warder locks you in.
It is not the measly rations
Unfit for man or beast
Nor yet the emptiness of day
Dipping into the blankness of night
It is not
It is not
It is not
It is the lies that have been drummed
Into your ears for one generation
It is the security agent running amok
Executing callous calamitous orders
In exchange for a wretched meal a day
The magistrate writing in her book
Punishment she knows is undeserved
The moral ineptitude
Mental decrepitude
Lending dictatorship spurious legitimacy
Cowardice asked as obedience.

Lurking in our denigrated souls
It is fear damping trousers
We dare not wash off our urine
It is this
It is this
It is this
Dear friend, turns our free world
Into a dreary prison.

© *The True Prison*, extracted from *A Month and a Day & Letters*
by Ken Saro-Wiwa, (Ayebia, 2005). Published with the kind
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Amnesty International

RESOURCE SHEET 5c

Selection of poems

If all the world were paper by Joseph Coelho

If all the world were paper
I would fold up my gran and take her
everywhere I go.
I would laminate my baby sister in bubble
wrap
and lay her to sleep in unbound fairy-tale
book pages
and should she get scared:
Rip every fear,
Shred every scream,
Tear every tear.

If all the world were paper
I would re-bind my grandfather,
smooth out the dog-ears to all his stories,
place his younger days in a zoetrope
and flush the harrowing chapters
down an ink-gurgling well.

If all the world were paper,
kind deeds would be post-it notes
that stuck to the doer in ever growing
trails,
so we would always remember,
friends would come with perforated lines
so you could keep their best bits with you
at all times.

If all the world were paper,
Christmas wrapping foil and birthday
cards
would follow you to school.

If all the world were paper
dreams would be Braille
so we could read them whilst we slept,
nightmares would be shopping lists
because shopping lists are so easy to forget.

If all the world were paper
arguments would rustle before they started
and could be put right with a little tape.

If all the world were paper
we could paperclip families together,
draw smiles on all the sad faces,
rub out the tears,
cover our homes in Tipex and start all over again.

All the world is not paper
but whilst we can imagine it were
we can recycle the rough times
knowing we will never – ever fold.



RESOURCE SHEET 5d

Selection of poems

Child Labour

by Paul Lyalls

Where the school bell does not ring
no play time for little hands that ache and sting.
Where trainer soles are burned on the spirit of children's souls.
and mobile phones do not return unanswered calls.
A conveyor belt of Laptops replace a mother's lap
Can you believe the price of that?
Where the work begins as the sun rises
and when the sunsets there are no surprises.
Little hands attaching computer chips is not a childhood moment.
Before you buy, listen carefully to your purchase,
does it come with a child's cry, and is it worth this?

© Paul Lyalls



RESOURCE SHEET 5e

Selection of poems

The Story of a City

by Samih al-Qasim

Translated from the Arabic by Abdullah al-Udhari

A blue city

Dreamt of tourists

Shopping day after day.

A dark city

Hates tourists

Scanning cafés with rifles.

© Samih al-Qasim (Saqi Books 1984)



Amnesty International

RESOURCE SHEET 5f

Selection of poems

People Equal

by James Berry

Some people shoot up tall.
Some hardly leave the ground at all
Yet people equal. Equal.

One voice is a non-sugar tomato
Another is sweet mango.
Yet people equal. Equal.

Some people rush to the front.
Other people feel they can't.
Yet people equal. Equal.

Blow hard on some people they fall.
Hammer others you meet a wall.
Yet people equal. Equal.

One person will sit on a star.
Others never get that far.
Yet people equal. Equal.

Some people never take off with their show.
Others are always on the go.
Yet people equal. Equal.

© James Berry (*The Story I Am In: Selected Poems*, Bloodaxe Books, 2011.
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