

# WORKSHOP: STARTING A POEM

## Accessibility text for video

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[0.06] Dr Rebecca Bullard and Kate Clanchy are sitting side-by-side behind a table with pieces of white card placed in front of them and some pens.

**Rebecca:** *I'm here with Kate Clanchy, and we're going to play a little game. It's called the Surrealist Game. Why is it called that, Kate?*

**Kate:** *Well, legend has it that it's played by the surrealist painters. So Salvador Dali did those paintings, you know, of the watch melting in the desert. There's a familiar poster. And other images which kind of combine ideas. So their pictures look very realistic in their detail. But they always are things that could never be.*

**Rebecca:** *Right.*

**Kate:** *So it's about combining things that are ideas, things that are abstract, with things which are concrete, which is things that you can sense. A concrete noun is one that you can feel, or smell, or touch, or hear. Air is concrete. People are always surprised to hear that. Because you can feel it.*

**Rebecca:** *But also, I suppose tables--*

[0.55] Kate places both hands flat on the table.

**Kate:** *Tables are concrete. Buses are concrete.*

**Rebecca:** *Right.*

**Kate:** *Pies are concrete. And then abstract, which, of course, is all the ideas, so all the -isms, all the school subjects-- racism, or sexism, but also chemistry. And also, all your feelings.*

**Rebecca:** *So love.*

**Kate:** *Kindness.*

**Rebecca:** *Kindness.*

**Kate:** *Meanness.*

**Rebecca:** *Sorrow.*

**Kate:** *My favourite is schadenfreude.*

**Rebecca:** [LAUGHS] *Abstract.*

**Kate:** *Abstract.*

**Rebecca:** *OK. So if we can touch it, it's concrete. If we can't, it's abstract.*

**Kate:** *That's right. It's really good fun to play it with a group. It's hilarious and also quite moving. But you can play it on your own. You can pick those two bits of yourself. Again, I mean, I think one of the things we're taught to do is to separate out the abstract bits of our brain and the concrete bits of our brain. But in a poem, you can bring them all back together.*

**Rebecca:** *So what do we have to do?*

**Kate:** *Well, you start off by tearing a piece of A4 paper into four.*

[1.52] Kate arranges 4 pieces of white card on the table in front of her in a 2 by 2 grid pattern.

**Kate:** *So in this case, we've got cards. And there we go-- four bits of paper.*

[2.02] Rebecca arranges 4 pieces of white card similarly in front of her.

**Kate:** *And then on your first bit of paper, if you could just think of a concrete noun.*

[2.06] The film cuts to a birds-eye view of the table with both Rebecca and Kate writing on cards. Kate writes the concrete noun 'penguin'. Rebecca writes the concrete noun 'sword'.

[2.15] The film cuts back to the view of Rebecca and Kate sitting side-by-side behind the table.

**Kate:** *And then just pretending you're the dictionary for a moment, just write a definition of that noun.*

[2.20] The film cuts to the birds-eye view. Kate writes the definition of 'penguin': 'A flightless bird which lives in the frozen ocean'. Rebecca writes the definition of 'sword': 'A sharp and dangerous weapon'.

[2.25] The film cuts back to the side-by-side view.

**Kate:** *And then, we think of an abstract noun.*

[2.29] The film cuts to the birds-eye view. Kate writes the abstract noun 'hope'. Rebecca writes the abstract noun 'joy'.

[2.34] The film cuts back to the side-by-side view.

**Kate:** *And then, again, channeling the dictionary, a little bit harder, we define what this is.*

[2.42] The film cuts to the birds-eye view. Kate writes the definition of 'hope': 'the condition of believing that things will get better'. Rebecca writes the definition of 'joy': 'intense happiness, a feeling'.

[2.48] The film cuts back to the side-by-side view.

**Kate:** *I think what we do now is if we can get a couple of magic extra contributions from the crew.*

Kate looks up, beyond the camera, to talk to the crew.

**Crew:** *Sure. Yeah.*

[2.54] The crew have contributed additional white cards which Rebecca and Kate have shuffled along with their own and they tap them together on the table and then hold them in piles in their hands.

**Kate:** *Yeah? Right. OK. Here we go.*

**Rebecca:** *So what do we do?*

**Kate:** *So now we've got a pile of nouns [Kate points to Rebecca's pile] and we've got a pile of definitions [Kate looks down at the pile in her own hands]. And what we do is we take the first noun that comes off the top of our pile, and I'll take the first definition, and we'll see if we can find a poem.*

**Rebecca:** *OK. Ready?*

**Kate:** *I'm ready.*

[3.10] Rebecca places her top card containing the word 'camera' at the top left of the table area.

**Rebecca:** *Here's the first noun. It's a camera.*

[3.18] Kate places the card containing the definition 'intense happiness, a feeling' next to it to the right.

**Kate:** *A camera. Camera is intense happiness, a feeling. OK*

Rebecca places the card containing the word 'déjà vu' under the card with the word 'camera' on the table.

**Rebecca:** *Déjà vu.*

**Kate:** *Déjà vu is a negative emotion*

[3.27] Kate places the card containing the definition 'a negative emotion' next to Rebecca's card, to the right.

They continue placing each noun on the left to create a list, with a definition next to each, on the right.

**Rebecca:** *Belonging.*

**Kate:** *Is the condition of believing that circumstances will improve.*

**Rebecca:** *Sadness.*

**Kate:** *Is a machine for capturing images.*

**Rebecca:** *And hope.*

**Kate:** *Hope is the feeling of having been here before.*

[3.56] The film cuts back to the side-by-side view.

**Kate:** *We're writing a poem about making a film. Isn't that interesting? OK.*

**Rebecca:** *A hare.*

[4.03] The film cuts to the birds-eye view. Having placed the first 5 nouns with their definitions in two columns to the left of the table, and realising that the poem will be about making a film, they create a list of the next 5 nouns and definitions in the middle of the table.

**Kate:** *Is a sense of love and home.*

**Rebecca:** *Confusion.*

**Kate:** *Confusion—*

Kate takes the first card and then returns it to the bottom of the pile and selects the next.

**Rebecca:** *That was the original definition, wasn't it?*

**Kate:** *Confusion is clothing for the head. OK. Nice one.*

**Rebecca:** *Yeah, I like that. A penguin.*

**Kate:** *A penguin is a sharp and dangerous weapon.*

**Rebecca:** *Joy.*

**Kate:** *Is a flightless bird which lives in the frozen ocean.*

[4.41] The film cuts back to the side-by-side view.

**Rebecca:** *Oh, I really like that. Sad, though.*

**Kate:** *It is sad.*

**Rebecca:** *A sword.*

[4.47] The film cuts to the birds-eye view of the table.

**Kate:** *Is an organ over the body. Whew.*

[4.53] Rebecca places the first card of the final set of 2 columns, on the right-hand side of the table.

**Rebecca:** *A hat.*

**Kate:** *Is a mammal often mistaken for a rabbit.*

**Rebecca:** *Skin.*

**Kate:** *Is the state of feeling lost with too many options.*

The cards are now all laid out in 6 columns, 4 of which contain 5 rows and 2 of which contain 2 rows.

**Kate:** *Here we go.*

[5.10] The film cuts back to the side-by-side view with Rebecca and Kate studying the cards in front of them.

**Kate:** *So if we were going to turn that into a poem, what are the images that we'd pick?*

[5.18] The film cuts to the birds-eye view. Kate is pointing to the card containing the noun 'camera'.

**Kate:** *Camera-- I mean, it is a poem about filming, isn't it?*

**Rebecca:** *And about seeing things.*

**Kate:** *And Déjà vu and things coming back.*

**Rebecca:** *Yeah.*

**Kate:** *And the feeling of belonging and the sadness. Hope is the feeling of having been here before. Confusion is clothing for the head. And joy is a flightless bird which lives in the frozen ocean. Which will we take? Which are very powerful? The joy is a good one, isn't it?*

Kate removes the pair of cards containing 'joy' and 'Is a flightless bird which lives in the frozen ocean' and gives them to Rebecca who places them to the right of the table.

**Rebecca:** *I really like that one.*

**Kate:** *Let's have that one, have that one. Confusion is clothing for the head, I like.*

Kate removes the pair of cards containing 'confusion' and 'clothing for the head' and places them above the 'joy' pair in front of Rebecca.

**Kate:** *We can get somebody putting their confusion hat on.*

Kate removes the pair of cards containing 'skin' and 'the state of feeling lost with too many options' and places them in a pile in front of her.

**Kate:** *'A hat is a mammal often mistaken for a rabbit.'*

[LAUGHTER]

**Rebecca:** *Do we want that one?*

**Kate:** *I don't know. It's quite sweet.*

Kate's hands return to the top of the left-hand column and point at 'camera'

**Kate:** *Camera-- a camera is intense happiness. And sadness is a machine for capturing.*

**Rebecca:** *Those two—*

Kate is pointing at the top two rows of the left-hand column containing Camera: intense happiness – a feeling, and Déjà vu: a negative emotion.

**Kate:** *Those two are nice aren't they?*

**Rebecca:** *Yeah, they are.*

**Kate:** *And you've got that feeling of-- if we just take the belonging out for the moment.*

Kate removes the two cards containing 'belonging' and 'Is the condition of believing that circumstances will improve' and places them to the side.

**Kate:** *A hare is a sense of love and home. Sadness is a machine for capturing.*

Kate then moves the pair, 'hare' and 'a sense of love and home' to the left-hand column which now reads: Camera: intense happiness, a feeling. (Next row) déjà vu: a negative emotion. (Next row) hare: a sense of love and home. (Next row) sadness: a machine for capturing images.

**Kate:** *So it's maybe about a nature documentary maker, isn't it?*

**Rebecca:** *Yes.*

**Kate:** *Confusion-- joy is a flightless bird.*

**Rebecca:** *The flightless bird goes—*

**Kate:** *Yeah. Goes in somewhere.*

[6.37] They move 'joy' and 'a flightless bird which lives in the frozen ocean' to sit between 'hare' and 'sadness'.

**Rebecca:** *And that—Where do you want that?*

**Kate:** *In there. Something like that?*

**Rebecca:** *Yeah.*

**Kate:** *Yeah. Camera is intense happiness, a feeling. Déjà vu is a negative emotion. A hare is a sense of love and home. Joy is a flightless bird which lives in the frozen ocean. Sadness is a machine for capturing images. Maybe you can have this confusion up there?*

[7.03] The film cuts back to the side-by-side view. Kate moves the 'confusion' pair to create the top row in the middle of the table.

**Kate:** *Do we need the hat? It's quite nice.*

**Rebecca:** *We'll take just that.*

Rebecca points at the cards in the left-hand column.

**Kate:** *Just that?*

**Rebecca:** *Yeah. Poems can be short as well as long.*

**Kate:** *Long-- and that could be a poem on its own about hats.*

Rebecca moves the final two cards and places them under the 'confusion' pair.

**Rebecca:** *Confusion is clothing for the head.*

**Kate:** *A hat is a mammal often mistaken for a rabbit. So that's a poem about hats.*

**Rebecca:** *There's something I like about the rhythm of those words.*

**Kate:** *Yeah.*

**Rebecca:** *A hat is a mammal often mistaken for a rabbit.*

**Kate:** *Shall we take the hare out of there? I mean, it's quite nice.*

Kate removes the 'hare' and 'a sense of love and home' cards out of the columns on the left-hand side and places them to the side.

**Kate:** *But that's a poem, isn't it, about making a film, about moving forwards.*

**Rebecca:** *Moving forwards.*

**Kate:** *A camera is intense happiness. Déjà vu is a negative emotion. Joy is a flightless bird which lives on the frozen ocean. And sadness is a machine for capturing images.*

[7.52] The film cuts back to the birds-eye view. There are now two sets of two columns of cards. The set on the left-hand side contains 4 'lines' of the poem. The set on the right-hand side contains just two 'lines'. Rebecca gesticulates with her hands at the lines on the left-hand side.

**Rebecca:** *Some of the patterns that have come up through the kind of random distribution of cards are really interesting aren't they, that in our poem, we're starting with the camera, and we're ending with a conventional definition for a camera. But we've seemed to have gone on a strange journey in between.*

[8.12] The film cuts to the side-by-side view.

**Kate:** *So if you play this game, you can, you know, do, like, a little haiku with one of the images, or you can write a huge multiple thing, or you can just spark off the surface to write in any way you want.*

**Rebecca:** *Great.*

[8.24] Rebecca turns to look at the camera.

**Rebecca:** *But we would encourage you to play this game and play it with your friends, play it with the people around you, or play it on your own. But it's a wonderful way of getting started. And it's a lot of fun.*

**Kate:** *It is.*