



KOESTLER ARTS - ART AID

Koestler Arts produces monthly Art Aid sheets featuring creative tasks that can be done in cell and with just paper and a pencil.

Although the 2023 Koestler Awards deadline passed on 6 April, we hope these sheets will inspire you to remain creative and perhaps try something new. New Art Aid sheets are available from the first Monday of every month.

JULY 2023

For each Art Aid sheet, we commission an artist or writer who has been engaged with Koestler Arts to set a creative task and share their experience with creativity. This month we asked former Koestler Award winner and mentee Stephen, whose poetry has been featured in a number of our exhibitions and publications.

My Story

Isn't life strange? I would never in a million years have wanted to go to prison and if I could turn the clock back and change things I would. Yet when I look back, the six years I spent in prison have helped shape the man I am today. On that sentence I rediscovered my love for writing. For the first time in years I had the time to get my thoughts down on paper and I started to write little poems. Nothing special, just little poems.

I saw a Koestler Awards poster in a prison library and decided to enter some of the things I'd written. To my amazement two of my poems won small prizes. More importantly, I received genuine feedback encouraging me to keep on writing. In the ten years or so since I first entered, my poems have appeared in three Koestler anthologies, been displayed in exhibitions at the Southbank Centre, London and HOME, Manchester, and I've been mentored by Nick from Koestler Arts who has gently coaxed me in the right direction.

Today I perform regularly at open mic nights and read my work at probation events. I have a whole new dimension to my life that gives me satisfaction and helps me make sense of the world. There is nothing special about me, I was just a lonely individual in a prison cell wondering how to cope. But because of writing, a whole new world has opened up for me and that new world is available to you too if you just begin by putting pen to paper.

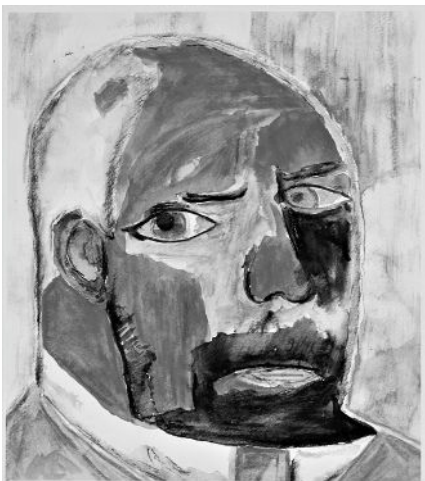


My Task: Other People's Shoes

Writing gives you the opportunity to be anybody you want to be, and even people you don't want to be! In my recovery I have found it useful in difficult situations to put myself in somebody else's shoes. This helps me get a better perspective on the situation and always leads to a better outcome.

What I would like you to do is think of someone in a job that is often disliked and try to imagine what life is like for them. Write a poem from their point of view and live for a moment in their shoes. I have imagined myself as a traffic warden, but the list is endless. You could be a politician, a doctor's receptionist, a judge, or even a prison officer. See after you have finished whether you feel differently about that person.

Have fun and don't underestimate the power of writing to change lives!



L: Portrait, HM Prison Cardiff, First-Time Entrant Award for Portrait, 2020
R: Shadow Face, HM Prison Barlinnie, Portrait, 2019

I Am a Traffic Warden

I am a traffic warden,
I love my mum and dad,
My middle name is Gordon,
And I really ain't that bad.

I am a traffic warden,
I suffer with my feet,
My sister lives in Morden,
And my best pal's name is Pete.

I am a traffic warden,
Disney movies make me cry,
I once met Denis Norden,
And I don't like Stephen Fry.

I am a traffic warden,
I like chips and cheese on toast,
I drive a little Ford, an',
Take day trips to the coast.

I am a traffic warden,
Prick my finger and I bleed,
I might be a little borin',
But for hate I have no need.

I am a traffic warden,
I am human just like you,
So before you stick your oar in,
See things from my point of view.

You don't need to send your responses to this task to us at Koestler, we just hope you'll enjoy giving it a go. If you do we'll be very happy to read them but please note they won't be entered into this year's Koestler Awards and we won't be able to return them to you.