

KOESTLER ARTS - ART AID

Koestler Arts produce monthly Art Aid sheets featuring creative tasks that can be done in cell with just paper and a pencil. New sheets are available from the first Monday of every month.

We are now accepting entries to the 2025 Koestler Awards! Send your entries and signed entry forms to 'FREEPOST Koestler Arts' by 11 April 2025. Entry forms should be enclosed with this sheet, and you can contact your education department or Koestler Arts to be sent more. See our guidance notes for full terms and conditions.

FEBRUARY 2025

For each Art Aid sheet, we commission an artist or writer who has engaged with Koestler Arts to set a creative task and share their experience with creativity. This month we asked Darren, who has recently joined our arts mentoring scheme.

My Story

My journey to Koestler Arts has been unusual. Despite completing my last prison sentence over 20 years ago, it often feels like yesterday. Painful memories linger, demanding to be acknowledged. The past rages to belong somewhere. I needed to reframe my past in a healthy way.

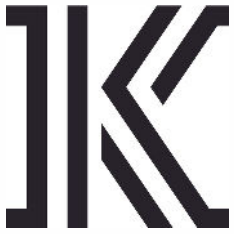
Recently, my ability to suppress trauma resurfaced, leading to my first offence in over 20 years. Thankfully it wasn't catastrophic. The experience led me to a substance-abuse rehabilitation programme where I rediscovered the gift of writing, to reframe my story.

Having the tools to name and navigate trauma has always proved difficult for me. Writing literally saved my life.

This is where Koestler Arts mentoring enters my story. It feels like the missing piece in a very complex jigsaw. It's early stages yet, but already it's helping me sharpen the gift, to reimagine a better future.

Which Personality Today?, The Spinney, Painting, 2024





My Task: Reframing Your Story, Reimagining Your Future

This task engages both mind and heart. Writing to revisit the past and dream of a different future can help us process loss, shame, fear, hope, and identity.

I've learned to view my life through three lenses:

1. The Window: My past, including my inner world, a hidden culture, history, and pain. There's a whole world 'behind' me that many can't see.
2. The Picture: The image I project, often a facade of bravado and learned attitudes.
3. The Film Camera: The future I imagine, filled with hope and the possibility of a different ending.

Part 1: Take three pieces of paper (or three columns if you just have one sheet) - one for each lens - and jot down the things that come to mind for each. Don't overthink, just get things out:

1. The Window: Note the words, people, and places that represent your past.
2. The Picture: Reflect on unhealthy coping mechanisms and the masks you wear.
3. The Film Camera: Imagine your ideal future: healing, purpose, dreams.

Part 2: Place the three pages side-by-side. Using a fourth piece of paper, try writing a poem or short story made up of three stanzas, paragraphs or chapters, each representing a lens, but bringing this process of reflection together. If you find it easier, use key words and themes and focus more on journey and movement, not necessarily grammar or style.

Here's an example from me to get you started.

Part 2:

Part 1:

1. The Window: ghetto life, painful places
2. The Picture: prison life, hidden faces
3. The Film Camera: freedom waits, full of graces

There's a world behind me that nobody sees,
a broken boy in broken themes,
a broken system full of broken screams

There's the world of me that I let people see,
a picture perfect masks what's been,
the real me safe behind the sheen

There's a world in front that I have dreamed,
a world that's absent of regime,
a world of open hearts and open doors,
of calmer seas and safer shores

That's the world I dream

You don't need to send your responses to these tasks to us at Koestler, we just hope you'll enjoy giving them a go. If you do we'll be very happy to see them but please note they will only be entered into this year's Koestler Awards if they are sent with signed entry forms.