



Koestler Associates Newsletter Spring 2026

Hello from the Koestler team!

We hope you are continuing to find ways to explore and enjoy your creativity, and that those of you who entered the 2026 Koestler Awards enjoyed putting together your entries in recent months. As always, we are grateful to you for sharing your work with us and we're looking forward to another Awards year!

In this newsletter, we're sharing information about our recent exhibitions and events, and inviting you to take part in a creative challenge.

Our latest Art Aid sheet is also enclosed. It features a drawing task set by exhibited artist and mentee Luis. If you would like to be sent these creative activity sheets directly each month, write to us to sign up.



Relax, HM Prison Belmarsh,
Silver Award for Painting

Reminder

To remain an Associate and continue to receive these newsletters you need to have entered the 2026 Koestler Awards. If you didn't enter but would like to remain an Associate, please write to us and let us know by the end of the year.

Please also let us know changes to your address or contact details so we can ensure future newsletters, certificates, prize and sales money and returned artwork reach you! We will only know you have moved if you notify us.

For this or any other queries, you can always:

- **write to us for free at:** Freepost KOESTLER ARTS
- **email:** info@koestlerarts.org.uk
- **call:** 020 8740 0333

2026 Koestler Awards

The deadline for entering the 2026 Koestler Awards has now passed and our building is once again filled with parcels. Thank you to everyone who has submitted creative work this year, we can't wait to see, read and listen to it all!



Oscar the Octopus, Colnbrook Immigration Removal Centre, Sculpture

Below is a reminder of the timeline for the rest of this Awards year:

April - June	Entries logged in and added to our database
July - August	Entries reviewed by creative experts
28 August	Awards results announced on Koestler website and sent to establishment main contacts. Call or write to us after this date to find out your results
Late October	Certificates, feedback and prize money sent to establishments and entrants in the community
December	2026 Awards Annual sent to entrants
January - April 2027	Visual artwork entries returned to establishments and entrants in the community, unless sold or requested not to be returned
February 2027	Sales money issued to entrants

Exhibitions and Events

Through the Blue, The Old Fire Station, Oxford: 29 January - 14 March 2026

Our exhibition of creative work entered into the 2025 Koestler Awards from Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Surrey attracted more than 1,500 visitors, and lots of praise, during its run in Oxford at the start of this year.

“Such a good exhibition - it’s so great to see these works and get a glimpse into the artists’ lives and internal worlds.”

“I thoroughly enjoyed viewing this collection - there is an immense amount of talent and creativity to be found in every piece.”

“This wonderful art is just what we need to remember our shared humanity and hope for the future!”



- Exhibition visitors



Horos: Crossing Boundaries, The Old Fire Station, Oxford: 1 March 2026

We partnered with community philosophers Andy West and Kate Halliwell to run philosophy workshops inspired by our exhibition *Through the Blue*. Participants explored ideas around boundaries, freedom and peace, and reflected on how the exhibited artworks connected to these themes. They were invited to write feedback on the works that most stood out to them in relation to these themes, which we have forwarded on to the exhibited artists.

Andy West has taught philosophy in over twenty prisons and was writer-in-residence at HMP Grendon. He is the author of *The Life Inside: A Memoir of Prison*, recently adapted for TV as the BBC One series *Waiting for the Out*. Kate Halliwell is a philosophical trainer and facilitator, who runs workshops with a range of community groups, including at art galleries.



Once Upon a Time book launch: 9 April 2026

We were pleased to attend the launch of *Once Upon a Time*, an anthology of prison writing, which is the debut publication from Bang Up Books, a prison reading campaign.



The book contains a range of writing including poetry, rap, and even a business plan, exploring themes including judgement, time, love and loss, all written in prisons in England and Wales.

The process of selecting pieces to be included was done in prisons too, as was the design and printing of the book. The cover art was produced by someone with lived experience of prison, supported by the Koestler Arts mentoring programme.

Once Upon a Time is being sold to raise money for the Samaritans to continue their vital work supporting mental health across the prison community. It is available to buy on the Koestler Arts website.

Laura Suggitt, Director of Bang Up Books

Voices from Prison, Riverside Studios, London: 11 March 2026

We were delighted to again hold our annual showcase of Koestler Award winning music and writing, *Voices from Prison*, this time at Riverside Studios in West London.

The event was hosted by Lady Unchained, a poet, mentor, broadcaster, and editor of the fifth volume of our poetry anthology, *Koestler Voices: New Poetry from Prisons*. Four writers with experience of the criminal justice system performed poems from this volume, as well as their own work. One of these writers, Tom, describes the event below:



Lady Unchained and Tom, on stage at *Voices from Prison*

“Never in my wildest dreams, whilst sitting in a cell, did I think I would end up performing at the famous Riverside Studios in Hammersmith! Two and half years on from that dreaded first night, Koestler made it happen. I didn’t start writing poetry or spoken word until I went to prison. There are a lot of creative people locked away behind bars, and I think being around them inspired me to find my own voice. This ended up with me not only speaking my own poetry on stage but having the privilege to share poems by three other poets, who couldn’t be there themselves.

The night started by turning up early for a little run through with the Koestler staff and the host Lady Unchained. This was a great opportunity to meet everyone, including the three other performers. I think we were all a little bit nervous but excited at the same time. Sometimes it’s hard to differentiate between the two feelings.

Before we knew it, it was showtime!!!

The first to grace the stage was the incredible Lady Unchained. With her charismatic way she made the audience laugh and put us performers at ease. She explained to the audience why events like *Voices from Prison* are so important, speaking up for those who feel like they have no voice. She then performed a few poems from her book *Behind Bars*, one of which was a highlight of the evening for me, when she recited from memory *Road to Victory*. Powerful words!

Lady Unchained



Each performer had their own style, whether it was a poem about being a book thief, being lifted off, or missing proper food. We all picked poetry that stood out to us from the latest Koestler collection. These poems are being read, performed and heard by a bigger audience now. The event was sold out. This amplifies the voices of the people who feel like they have none and shows that people do want to hear what we have got to say!!!

Having events like this, I really do hope that encourages people in the criminal justice system to carry on writing and sending in their work to Koestler, because you never know where it might take you.”

Book Thief

I'm a serial book thief and I can barely read.
I just love looking around whilst they're surrounding me.
Crime writing, philosophy and books about space.
I'll read 10 pages, so I can get a taste.

Detectives detecting and spies being courageous.
Travel guides describing all these amazing places.
Tenacious heroes trying to save the world,
Pirates trying to figure out where's the chest of pearls.

Psychology, biographies and wildlife too,
Comic strips, manga and books about 'the truth'.
If I ever visit the library to go and have a look,
Just know I'm walking out of there with my five books!

Koestler Voices: New Poetry from Prisons

Edited by Lady Unchained

Vol.5

Koestler Award winning poems from Volume 5 of our poetry anthology were performed at the event

Back to Basic (excerpt)

Bad men putting on the frighteners
Superglue made of magnolia whiteners
Search stripped, kettle whipped,
Cue tipped, spice hit.

Left sided chicken thighs,
Behind the door getting UTled
Positive, then negative.
Put a comp1-in-about-it.

Landing feuds, about hooch getting brewed.
Dissatisfaction about the same shit food.
Drug addicts in remission,
Simple screws getting nicely conditioned.

DST in they come,
Snitch run intel spun.
Razor rage,
Pava sprayed,
Wrapped up and segged away.



Voices from Prison audience

Poems by Tom, performed at *Voices from Prison*

Creative Challenge: Collecting Colour

We hope you'll enjoy this activity, and that it helps develop a practice of noticing and being inspired by the things around you. It encourages both mindfulness (the process of purposely bringing your attention to the here and now) and creativity, and can be repeated whenever you are seeking some calm and/or inspiration.

The idea is to take notice of wherever a particular colour appears in your surroundings, and use what you see to create something. We know prisons and secure settings can be drab places, but you should be able to try this wherever you are, and even if you don't have access to coloured art materials.

'Collecting colour' is a popular creative exercise, often associated with American writer and artist William S. Burroughs, who described his 'colour walks' in the 1960s:

"I was taking a colour walk around Paris the other day...when I looked out I was seeing all the blues in the street in front of me, blue on a foulard...blue on a young workman's...blue jeans...a girl's blue sweater...blue neon...the sky...all the blues. When I looked again I saw nothing but all the reds of traffic lights...car lights...a café sign...a man's nose."

- William S. Burroughs, from an interview with Brion Gysin in 1960

Choose a colour and keep an eye out for it while you go about your normal day or week. Make a mental (or actual) note of everything you see in this colour. Then create something using what you have seen. Here are some ideas:

- Draw each of the items you saw in your chosen colour. You could put them together into a monochromatic scene, or draw each on a separate piece of paper. You could compile your favourites as a series of drawings, or create a small handmade book with a drawing on each page. Even if you can't use colour, bringing together these disparate items will still make for an interesting set of drawings.
 - o To create a handmade book for your set of drawings, fold a number of same-sized pieces of paper in half, then poke two small holes in the fold, and put thread or a thin strip of paper through both holes in a loop to bind the pages.
- Write down everything you've seen in your chosen colour. You could write them as a list, creating a poem, or write a story or describe a scene, incorporating each item into your description.
- If you have access to glue, you could tear out swatches of your chosen colour from newspapers, magazines and packaging, and create a collage with different shades of the same colour. You could use collage to colour a drawing of an object that would either normally or never be that colour.

To develop whatever you create into a more complex piece, you might really focus in on a particular image or a few items, and create a new piece of artwork or writing inspired by this. And you can of course repeat the activity with every other colour you can think of!

On the following pages we have compiled some past Koestler Awards entries with colour in common, which may inspire your 'collecting' and creating.

You don't need to send anything you create through this activity to us at Koestler, and anything you do send won't be able to be returned or entered into this year's Koestler Awards. If you enjoy the exercise and create something you're really happy with, you might want to hold on to it and enter it to the 2027 Koestler Awards in January. Enjoy!

Green

Grass, long and silky or short and mossy like velvet
Runaway processed peas
Escape from the fork unless mushy and moreish
Extra crunchy outside, pulpy inside from green to white apples
Newest are sweetest

Green, Arbury Court, Poem, 2021



Trees, HM Prison Cookham Wood, Outstanding Debut Award for Painting, 2024



5 a Day,
HM Prison Woodhill,
Handmade Book, 2024



The Matrix, HM Young Offender Institution Feltham,
Arts Society Chiswick First-Time Entrant Award for Drawing,
2021



Look Into My Eye, HM Prison Peterborough, Painting, 2023



Look Behind This (detail), Prisoners Abroad, Silver Award for Craft, 2017



Shared Light (1 of 5), HM Prison La Moye,
Zelda Cheatle Bronze Award for
Photography, 2024



End of the Day,
HM Prison Greenock, Commended
Award for Painting, 2023

Self Portrait,
Vinney Green
Secure
Children's
Home, Fast
Feedback
Highly
Commended
Award for
Portrait, 2022



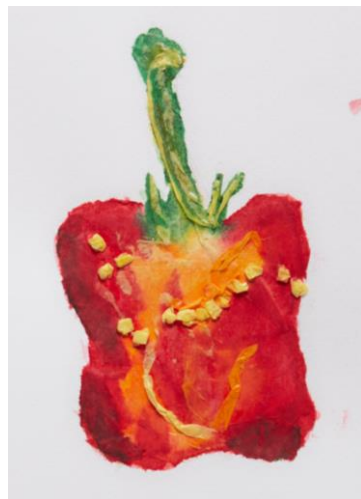
Tasty Lolly, HM Prison Dumfries, Drawing, 2022

TASTE



STRAWBERRY SPLIT

*Pair of Sweet
Peppers (1 of 2)*,
HM Prison
Eastwood Park,
Themed
Category: Taste,
2022



Children, the Colour in Our Lives,
HM Prison Send, Painting, 2023



