YOUNG POETS NETWORK

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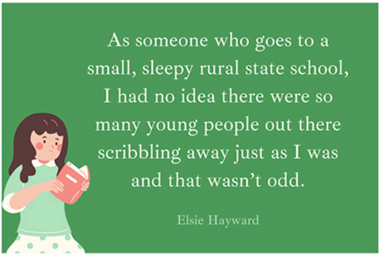
# Ten Reasons To Get Involved in Young Poets Network

We think Young Poets Network (now ten years old) is a welcoming, friendly space for you to develop your skills and find your tribe – but don't take it from us! Here are some of the reasons why you should get involved, from the young people who have.

## 1. To find other young people who care as much about poetry as you do



As someone who goes to a small, sleepy rural state school, I had no idea there were so many young people out there scribbling away just as I was and that wasn't odd.

Elsie Hayward

That's right – it's not just you! Thousands of young people write and submit poems to Young Poets Network challenges every year. When you enter a poem, you join a vibrant community of young writers from around the UK and the world.

> I think there's often this misconception of writers, especially poets, as being isolated up in a garret somewhere – YPN laughs in the face of this, and makes poetry feel welcoming and accessible, like anyone can read, write, enjoy it. As someone who can't drive and who lives in quite a rural area, the poetry world can feel very far away – I can't, for example, go up to London every week for a reading or workshop. YPN plugs that gap, bringing poetry right into my home. It is hugely democratising. (Ellora Sutton)
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> In India, it has actually been a bit difficult for me to find friends who work on poetry with the same craziness as myself. During the lockdown in 2020, I ended up making a few friends online via YPN and they're amazing at what they do. I'm really grateful for being able to find people I can discuss a lot of poetry with. (Jayant Kashyap)

Because Young Poets Network is online and totally free, anyone can access our opportunities. And we're a friendly bunch – you don't have to be a pro to enter YPN challenges. In fact, more than half of the winners had never published a poem anywhere else.

> Knowing there's a space for young poets, where you're not expected to be 100% polished and professional is really great. It gives you room to grow. (Libby Russell)
>
> YPN is such a relaxed and friendly scene. Poetry may sometimes seem aloof, but poets are normal people, who go to school, have jobs, families, lives, and we write. YPN showed me that there is a place for me, and all young poets. I am sure they would love to help you find yours. (Nadia Lines)

## 2. To write more poetry

Every time I was feeling blocked, I'd look up one of the challenges and it would push me to read more poems and try a new form or theme in my work.

Fathima Zahra

Many of us find that working to a deadline can give a bit of impetus to finish that poem. We run around fifteen writing challenges every year, which run for around two months each. Each challenge offers a new prompt, technique or way into a subject, and is always free to enter. Even old challenges can serve as inspiration for your writing.

> The greatest pleasure of YPN challenges is how they lead you away from well-trodden paths, overworked muses. They take you to a creative buffet! You might not like every dish, every form, every concept offered to you, but you're willing to take a bite of each. Don't see the challenges as something to win, but something to have fun with. You'll be surprised at how much you end up taking away from that play, that experimentation. Thanks to YPN, I've written over thirty poems that wouldn't have existed otherwise. (Jack Cooper)
>
> Young Poets Network was what spurred me on to start writing poetry in the first place. The challenges have made me write about things and in ways I never would have and although it hasn't always suited me it made me explore so many different ways of writing. I've never been short of inspiration and the regular challenges have been a great motivation to just keep writing and sending my work out. (Elsie Hayward)
>
> The prompts given on YPN have led to me writing far more poems than I would have otherwise. When I started writing poetry, I was so shy that my poetry made me feel embarrassed – and then to see that I had made so much I started to feel proud. I hated my voice – now all I want to do is use it. (April Egan)

## 3. To share your work on stages and worldwide

Young Poets Network readings are always genuinely the highlight of my summer.

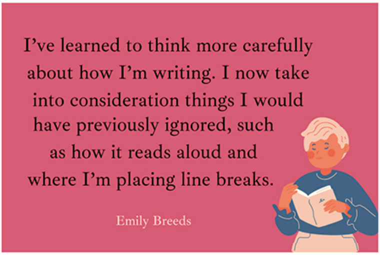
Em Power

Where possible, we give young poets the chance to perform at awards ceremonies, poetry readings, conferences, book fairs and more. We also run Young Poets Takeovers – events specifically for young poets to share their work and meet each other, where there is always an open mic for absolutely anyone to perform.

> Young Poets Network has given me some amazing opportunities. One of the very proudest I have ever been was when I won the Artlyst Art to Poetry challenge and attended the virtual awards ceremony from my living room with all my family. Even in a pandemic, it was such a wonderful and uplifting celebration, and it was one of the first times I felt like a real poet with something like a real talent that other people might care about. (Elsie Hayward)

> When I was seventeen I got to travel to London to read a poem of mine at a Poetry Society event. I think I may have even got to skip a day of college! I remember being so nervous travelling down and thinking about what everyone would be like, and the event. It was such a relief and something I'll cherish that I found a lovely tucked away place (The Poetry Café!) full of people willing to talk to me about poetry. I think that was my first time properly getting to discuss poetry in a non-academic way, and it made such a difference to me that it was a welcoming and supportive space. (Lucas Sheridan)
>
> The first time I ever read my work to an audience was at a Young Poets Takeover. I've met so many incredible people at those events – met a bestie of mine called Nadia Lines at one – and heard so many beautiful poems. Through live readings and reading the work of other young poets, as well as collaborating with them for various competitions, I've really begun to see writing as a communal thing. (Em Power)

## 4. To improve your writing, editing and performing skills



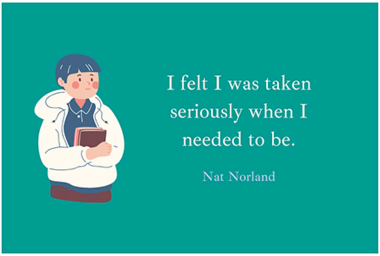
I've learned to think more carefully about how I'm writing. I now take into consideration things I would have previously ignored, such as how it reads aloud and where I'm placing line breaks.

Emily Breeds

Taking part in writing challenges, reading other poems by young people, exploring the features and how-to guides, and coming to our events will all help you develop your craft and find your voice.

> Participating in the challenges on YPN has definitely forced me to think more about the actual craft and construction of my poems! With YPN, knowing that there would be an audience reading my poems meant I needed to make sure there was a basic level of clarity in my writing, so I had to polish it on a very nitty-gritty, technical level. This was super helpful in allowing me to improve my writing! (Lydia Wei)
>
> The Re-Re-Re-Drafting Challenge changed the way I edit my work, as have the translation challenges. I've become much more confident in my poetry, actually seeking out open mics to perform at – something I would never had done without YPN. (Ellora Sutton)
>
> I've been challenged to write things I wouldn't expect, so I've become more confident in trusting that 'weird' voice. (Emily Breeds)
>
> Lately, I've been writing cultural/literary criticism rather than poetry… but I still draw on the skills that helped me succeed with YPN. My experience writing poetry helps me when I'm drafting, re-reading, and editing articles. (Irma Kiss Barath)

## 5. Because winning will boost your confidence…



I felt I was taken seriously when I needed to be.

Nat Norland

> It's so valuable to have someone look at your work and acknowledge what you're doing, especially early on. To not feel like you're just talking to yourself. Certainly helped me stick with it. If I'd let my writing peter out before I got to university, my life would have taken a completely different shape. (Nat Norland)
>
> Opening the email telling me that I has won the Turn Up the Volume challenge is honestly one of my happiest memories of being a teenager. It was so exciting, and was the first time that I had been told that my poetry was good, and worth reading. The validation encouraged me to keep going. (Nadia Lines)

We know it can make a world of difference, to hear that someone who isn't related to you has read your writing and likes it. We have the privilege of saying "keep going, you're brilliant!" to those who need to hear it, and we'll say it as often as we can, to as many people as we can. Including you. Keep going. You're brilliant.

> It was a big moment for me to realise that my writing had some kind of value outside of my head. Before YPN, I second guessed myself every time I wrote anything, and would over-edit and overthink every word until I was left with a piece of work that seemed almost shallow and over-produced. Doing well in a challenge gave me the boost in confidence that I needed in order to let myself be more experimental and create something that I could recognise as coming out of my brain! (Liberty)

And though of course it's true that it helps to hear someone else say "you're a great writer", ultimately only YOU can take the next steps to keep writing and improving. And so many of you do.

I think it gave me the confidence to trust my writing more. After that validation I felt a greater drive to write more.

Tom Rowe

> The encouragement that I received from YPN helped build my confidence as a poet and submit poetry to magazines and publishers. Since my YPN commendation I have published ten pamphlets and collections of poetry, and have seen my work in various magazines that I love including *Magma, Ambit* and *The Tangerine Magazine*. (Astra Papachristodoulou)
>
> I felt like a 'proper writer' for the first time and gained a huge amount of confidence. Now I have more conviction in my creative decisions. (Rachel Haddy)
>
> YPN gave me a huge sense of self-worth. I was surprised that my poetry received such a positive response. It really helped me believe that I could be, that I was, a poet. (John Blackmore)

## 6. ... and even if you don't win, you'll have created a new piece of art!

Just sharing your poetry with a writing community will empower you and give you confidence in ways you could not imagine.

Hania Habib

Okay, you might be thinking, this is all well and good but I hate losing competitions, and I've never won anything before! Well… as Lucas Sheridan writes, "YPN makes us feel like winning isn't the goal: the process and the learning is." Even if you submit a poem and don't win, you've still created something you wouldn't have otherwise, and maybe learnt something new or found a new avenue for your writing.

> You have literally nothing to lose! Best case scenario, you get a win and some lovely free books. Worst case, you've flexed your poetic writing muscles and can put it all down to experience. (Libby Russell)

The sad truth is that we can't publish everyone, and no publisher can. But what's the most important thing? Winning a competition? Or making something new, finding a new way to express yourself, and putting yourself out there?

> I think Young Poets Network is really open and helpful to both people who want to do and share their poetry more seriously (e.g. publishing books), and people, like me, who just want a way to express themselves to themselves. (Hero Ross Bain)
>
> There is no shame in putting your writing out there and receiving a no. On your writing journey, you are more likely to collect them than Pokémon cards. That's okay. Use it as inspiration to keep persevering. Getting published doesn't have to be the end goal. Long ago, I decided that all I can do is try. I'm never going to stop writing. (Olivia Todd)

And if you don't want to show your poems to anyone, you don't have to. You can still use the challenges as prompts and inspiration for your writing, and you can join in the community in other ways – sharing things on social media, coming to our events and joining our mailing list.

> Entering the challenges do so much for your confidence – even when you don't win! Even if you don't want to enter, I'd subscribe to the newsletter because the challenges have awesome prompts that could help you with your general writing. (Amelia Doherty)
>
> The best thing about YPN challenges is the ideas they give for future writing – YPN also made me think about translations of poetry as poems in their own right for the first time. (Eliza Liria)
>
> I've never even won anything but it really doesn't matter: I just feel so lucky to have stumbled across and become a part of this welcoming, encouraging, inspiring and exciting community. (Gemma Craig-Sharples)

## 7. To pass on the love

Sometimes if I'm leading a workshop on a specific theme I'll go on past competition winners and use those as examples. It is such a helpful resource!

Chloe Elliott

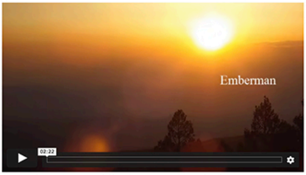
Many poets find themselves leading writing workshops, creative writing clubs or societies, and even becoming teachers themselves! Young Poets Network can help inspire you to help others write.

> Long after I pass the age of being able to enter, YPN will serve as stimulus for creating poems. My future students will be made aware of it. (Olivia Todd)
>
> Any time I meet a young person who shows even the slightest bit of interest in writing poetry, I immediately direct them to YPN. Because beyond the challenges, and the fantastic prompts, it's also a directory of resources – and a support network. (Annika Cleland-Hura)

## 8. Because YPN can lead you to unexpected places...

Over the years, we've sent young poets to perform in the Houses of Parliament, the National Maritime Museum, the University of Leeds, UniSlam, into professional recording studios and to explore the Bloodaxe Archives in Newcastle. We've published poems in printed anthologies and on baked goods. We've also run free performance, writing and translation workshops at The Poetry Café, London, and online, including a series of six workshops for one group in the summer of 2020. These opportunities can contribute to that feeling of validation, and might even spark a new life-long interest or friendship. You never know what might come of being a YPNer!

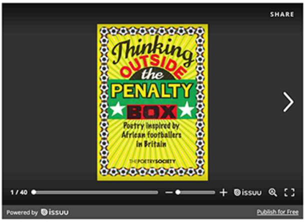
> I remember particularly going down to London after winning the Cape Farewell challenge, to record a poem to be set over music. The whole experience was very exciting, seeing the inside of this huge recording studio, which we only used a tiny corner of; but the thing that stays with me most was meeting the other winners, Rachel and Theo, and feeling like here were these people I'd never met before who cared about words in the exact same way I did. They were a little older than me and I was a bit over awed. But it was a very good day. (Nat Norland)



> I'll always cherish my time spent in the Bloodaxe Archive digging through the messy drafts of some of my favourite poets to write up for the YPN blog. It was such an exciting opportunity and contributed to my growing love of archives! (Lauren Aspery)
>
> My favourite YPN-related memory is the Young Poets Network *Modern Poetry in Translation* translation workshop in summer 2019. It remains the most interesting poetry-based workshop I've been to, and it sparked an interest in poetry translation that's since led me to run my own similar workshops and be published in *MPT*. I also really loved the summer 2020 online workshop series, which made such a huge difference to those long months of the first lockdown. Reading the work of, and getting feedback from, other young poets was invaluable and it was so nice to meet such a supportive group of writers. From both events, and the summer 2019 Young Poets Takeover, I've made friends I still speak to today. (Katie Kirkpatrick)

Clare Pollard leading the poetry translation workshop in the basement of The Poetry Café

> YPN helped me discover *Miracle Magazine* which I was published in and later became an Editor for, so I am very thankful for that. I also was amazed to win Second Prize in the 2016 Timothy Corsellis Prize, it was the first big poetry prize I did well in and was really encouraging to me. I got the chance to read alongside Kayo Chingonyi, which was a lovely experience. My Timothy Corsellis poem was set in France, where I used to live, and that gave me courage to continue to write about travel, place, and my experiences in a sensual, vivid way. (Elizabeth Gibson)
>
> My favourite memory was when I was invited to come down to London to write poems about footballers for the Thinking Outside The Penalty Box anthology. It's been years now but the anthology is still in my school, and even though it wasn't a big deal to anyone else, it did so much for my confidence to meet other poets and I'm still proud my line is the closer for the entire anthology! (Amelia Doherty)



## 9. Because you're only young once!

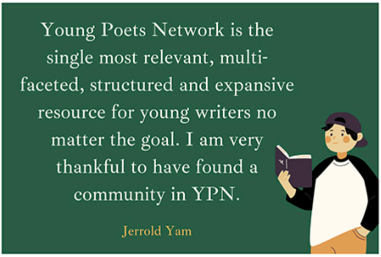
I wish I'd known about it much earlier.

Lauren Aspery

While absolutely anyone can enjoy and benefit from the prompts and resources on the website, Young Poets Network challenges and Young Poets Takeovers are open to those aged 25 and younger. Once you're in the YPN fold, we'll continue to offer you opportunities forever – so join in while you can! (If you're reading this and you're already 25+, remember that The Poetry Society has a heap of opportunities for adults, including local Stanza groups, membership, feedback, the National Poetry Competition and more – we'd love you to get involved too!)

> YPN was such a huge step on my poetry journey and it reminded me exactly why I love to write. I'm quite sad that I've only got a couple of years left so get involved sooner rather than later! I wish I'd known about it much earlier. (Lauren Aspery)
>
> I am so proud to be a member of YPN, and I will mourn the day I turn 26 and unable to be a part of it. (Emily Breeds)

## 10. Because YPN is simply the best

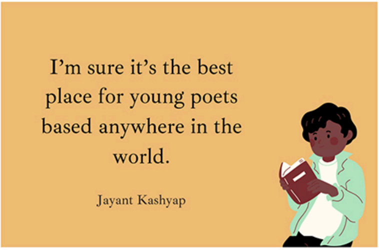


Young Poets Network is the single most relevant, multi-faceted, structured and expansive resource for young writers no matter the goal. I am very thankful to have found a community in YPN.

Jerrold Yam

> It's got everything – whether you'd like to read new poems, find resources on writing or find free writing challenges to submit to, YPN's incredibly resourceful and has been an immense space of support and encouragement that was crucial to me in my journey. (Fathima Zahra)
>
> If you're thinking about getting involved in YPN, definitely do it, without hesitation. They really care about developing new writers and they'll be able to help you regardless of whether you're just starting writing or have been writing for years. (Rachel Lewis)

> YPN is completely invaluable as a resource and is the reason I'm still writing poetry now. It's also a great way to make writer friends, so go to any events you can. (Katie Kirkpatrick)
>
> YPN offers so many fun and life-changing opportunities, such as information about Foyle Young Poets, workshops, news, and competitions. All of these things will help you grow as a writer, and become more involved with the lovely and welcoming space that is the poetry community. (Emily Breeds)
>
> Without sounding melodramatic, YPN gives me hope for humanity. It is refreshing to see a platform geared for young people, but open to anyone. It is an inclusive community and a safe haven from the stresses of everyday life. (Olivia Todd)
>
> You won't find another space like it for young poets. It's full of great opportunities and allows your work to be heard in a way you might never have imagined. It will make you feel like a real writer with a valuable voice. (Elsie Hayward)



I'm sure it's the best place for young poets based anywhere in the world.

Jayant Kashyap

What are you waiting for? Give our latest challenges a go, and sign up to our mailing list to be the first to know what we're offering young poets next.

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