



Chapter One – Introduction - Transcript

CHAPTER 1 - WHAT IS SPOKEN WORD?

So when I was at school the only poetry that I was ever exposed to was poets like Burns and Carol Ann Duffy and kind of contemporary page poets that, what we would have to do is use their poetry and do a close reading of it. Do a very in-depth critique where we tore every line and word apart and put it back together and just spent far too long figuring 'Do you think the poet meant this?' or 'Do you think the poet meant this or meant this?' and I hated it. I was so put off by anything poetry wise that even if spoken word had come into my life at that point, which it didn't, I probably wouldn't have engaged with it. But that would have been a huge mistake. So what I want you to do straight off the bat forget everything you think you know about poetry. Forget everything you think you know - just throw it away because it will not help you here. The way you think poetry has to be written, the way you think poetry has to sound, the way you think poetry has to be formatted, the way you think poetry works, what you think a poem is - chuck it out. Spoken word poetry is poetry that is written with performance in mind. It is things that are written to be spoken out loud. For that reason, what you actually write and how you write it doesn't matter because your audience doesn't get to see it. It's all about what is presented in that one space where you say that poem out loud that's what the poem is and because of this, because it is as much about the performance as it is about the writing, pretty much anything can be considered spoken word. A letter can be spoken word. A recipe can be spoken word. You might be sitting there thinking 'I've never written a poem in my life, I cannot write spoken word.' You might not have written a poem before but you have written a list, I guarantee you'll have written a list. Spoken word is about what you have to say not what is written on paper because what you have written on paper is too important to just stay there - it deserves to live out loud.

TRANSCRIPT FOR INTRODUCTION POEM

Hi. Was that [shit] sorry I'll do it again hello I mean tell me a story and when I tell you to tell me a story I really mean welcome home because my ears are the airbnb on the holiday of your dreams when I say your dreams I really mean my purpose because if you're on a journey then baby I'm your designated driver solid five-star uber review you passenger accomplice willing companion synchronized compass northwards on the highways of our histories have you ever rode the waltzer solo after stuffing your face full of fair ground fodder then you stand up and you try to go out through the in door pushing at the pull gate dizzying sick afterburner life rising in your throat earth rotation spinning between your ears I have a lot which is to say I have a lot of experience standing still when the way we move through space is the smallest force trying to push me around put another way I'm a good man in a storm I'm good at floating the water

never gets above my head only directly too I mean I will not let you drown when the oceans of this world wash inwards and carve coastlines to your front door my body will be sandbag and sail it's been a while since I've had to bail out the storm I mean I won't bail out on you if you ask me I will carry you over every horizon which is to say yeah I know I say a lot I have said a lot I know I talk too much but I've swallowed down so many stories that didn't agree with me I get tired of bringing up the past so tell me one of yours lace your voice with starlight because christ knows I'm scared of the dark when I say the dark I mean the silence when I say the silence I mean please don't leave me I don't want to be alone alone this girl falls in the forest and who gives a [shit] if anyone's around to hear it can can you learn to love the garden when it looks like the underbrush looks like the darkest part of the fairy tale the bit they leave out the stories I'm not a princess or warrior not hero or sidekick not magic wand or spindle prick I'm the witch they left out of the story the mostly good kind who comes and goes by bubble and holds you as you cry my magic can hold back the dark I mean I love you my name is the backbone of your question mark that thing you didn't know you didn't know let's find out together I mean hello I can't wait to get to know you.

SPARK BY SARAH GRANT

At the start of the show, I came on stage and I took three minutes to introduce myself before taking the audience on a journey and telling them a story. If this is the start of your spoken word journey; a journey that I hope lasts long after this programme is finished, then what better way to begin it than to be able to do the same - to introduce yourself in that way. By the end of this programme you will be able to do so.

WRITING EXERCISE – 3 THINGS I KNOW TO BE TRUE

So it's time for you to get out your notebooks and keep them out because we use them a lot in this programme, um, so use whatever it is you're comfortable with, um, I like a notebook but you can use loose leaf paper, you can use, um, a word document on your computer, you can use notes on your phone, or you can use a wax and tablet, whatever just whatever you're comfortable writing with. We're going to start with a super simple exercise. This is the first exercise that I ever learned when I was first exposed to spoken word poetry. So, um, grab your pen or open a document or do whatever, the only thing that I want you to do is to write down three things that you know to be true. Anything you like you're not allowed to think too hard about it you're only going to have one minute to do about it but three things I know to be true. I don't usually write in marker pen but I'm hoping that it shows up on the camera. You only have one minute to write down three things that you know to be true. Happy writing.

1 MINUTE TIMER

LESSON CONTINUES

And that's the end of our first exercise where you have written with conviction well done that is not easy. That exercise is the first exercise that I ever came across, um, when I was introduced to spoken word and the reason that we do that exercise is just to, um, One - get you writing and Two - get you writing about things that you know to be true -having the courage of your convictions. I learned that exercise in a TED Talk by Sarah Kay, who was one of my favourite poets and was my introduction to spoken word poetry. The point of that exercise is that if, see if we were in a larger setting - so a classroom or a group - and we started sharing our lists you

would realise that no one has the exact same thing that is on your list of three things you know to be true. The point is we can all teach each other things through connection and that is the first step in your spoken word journey.

CHAPTER 1 – STORY BEHIND THE SHOW

So I'd been writing and performing spoken word for about two years before I started writing 'Spark the show'. I kind of knew what I wanted to talk about and I wanted to talk about, I wanted to talk about me, I wanted to talk about who I was and how I found this journey I wanted to talk about the people in my life and I wanted to talk about what was important to me. But I was like I don't know whether that's something I can just do for a show I can't just be like 'Right settle in chaps I'm just gonna talk about stuff.' I knew that I had to figure out a way to do that. My sister and I were working together in a shop and we found out that there was a touring state, there was a touring production of 'Wicked' playing in Edinburgh we worked in Glasgow) and we didn't know that it was playing so we were like 'Do you want to get tickets for tonight?' We decided to go and we did, after work in our really gross grubby, um, work uniforms we went to the theatre and we were sitting up in the nosebleeds and... There was this bit, there's this bit in 'Wicked', and it's the moment right before the end of the first act where you have the show that brings, the the song that brings everyone to tears 'Defying Gravity' and at the, kind of, climax of this song the, the Wicked Witch of the West like rises up into the air and just sings it out to the audience. And as she did that, she went up so high (and we were so high in the seats) that there was a speaker that curved down and blocked her from my view. And I was like 'I'm gonna miss the most important part of the show!' So my sister grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and hauled me across so I was lying flat across her chair, squashing her, so that I could see too. And just that act of her pulling me across and making herself uncomfortable so that, she made sure that I got to share this moment with her. It just came so quickly I was like 'I'm going to talk about witches.' So I started researching it and I found the story of Jenny Horne and her daughter and it was just perfect just all the pieces just fell into place I just knew that using this story gave me the opportunity to talk about my family, talk about my, my heritage, talk about my country, talk about women, talk about sisterhood, talk about being persecuted. It gave me this opportunity to do all of that.

CHAPTER 1 – THE GOAL: AN INTRODUCTION POEM

Even after I had this epiphany about what story I wanted to tell and I knew how I was going to tell it, it took me so long to get started. Any time I sat down to start writing this show I had the little voice in my head being like 'Well who gave you permission? Who are you to ask people to come and see a show about witches? What makes you think that you can write a full-length show? Who do you think you are?' So I thought maybe this would be a, a good thing to do to start with I should write, um, a poem that is an introduction to me so that, so, if people were coming along to the show then, then they'd, I'd get to before I even started, I'd be like 'Here, here's some information about me so you're not thinking 'who is this person and why do they think they get to tell me a story?' I just wanted to give you a little bit of context of, who I am before I, I presume to tell you anything.' And that helped me so much. Sitting and taking stock of all the things that are important to me, everything that I'd want to share with people, everything that I thought was important to know about me, before I told you a story, really made me, kind of, understand that I can tell these stories and I don't need anyone's

permission. I am a person with stories and experiences and I can write poetry and that alone entitles me to share them with you if I want to and it does you too.

So the purpose of this programme is to give you all the tools that you need to start you off on your journey to writing spoken word. And at the end, you're going to write your own introduction poem. A roughly three-minute piece that you could take and walk into a room full of strangers stand and deliver it and let them know exactly who you are and what you're all about. Now you might be sitting there thinking right now 'absolutely not' but hopefully by the end of this programme you'll have changed your mind, and you'll look back on all the writing that you will have done (by doing the exercises that are in this programme) and think to yourself 'people need to hear this.'

WRITING EXERCISE - LIST POEM

So we're going to do another writing exercise and, before anyone freaks out, I'm not asking you to do any poetry right now all I'm asking you to do is to write a list. So we're going to go back to our notebooks - I have my handy camera above here that means I hope that you can actually see this. Um, so I want you to take a fresh page in your notebook and at the top write, write along with me just now, write down '10 things I wish people knew about me'. And you can either number the pages down the side or you can just write as you go, which I recommend because I always end up taking way more space than I've given myself if I write the numbers down the side. So you're going to write 10 things and you're not going to think too hard about them, you only have five minutes to do this, so I want a one-sentence answer for each of the things that you put down. Happy Writing.

FIVE MINUTE TIMER

EXERCISE CONTINUES

Okay, welcome back I hope you had fun writing those things down. Sometimes it can be really difficult just to go 'Oh my goodness what do I wish people knew about me?' What the harsh time limit, I hope, forced you to just write something down really quickly. Um, sometimes that brings out things that you didn't really know were there but you actually have a lot to speak about them. I also did this lesson so, um, I will read out what I wrote and as you can see on my page lots of things are scored out and taking up lots of lines and a real mess - which is absolutely fine this stage is not actually writing something that you're sitting down, I wouldn't just give you five minutes and say come up with the finished piece of writing, this is what we call the 'Planning stage' either the 'Mind mapping' or the 'Planning stage' and we go into both a lot later so this is just a little bit here. I, uh, did this exercise with you and I'm going to read out, uh, what I wrote and hopefully, if you're in a class setting, you will be encouraged to read out what you wrote and share what you wrote with people before we move on to the next stage. So '10 things I wish people knew about me' One - I am a Gemini. Two - I only cry at films. Three - I'm not actually a redhead. Four - I am Irish on both sides of my family tree. Five - I'm both a romantic and a realist. Six - I am a cat person. Seven - I pretend to like rock music but I actually listen to girl pop a lot. Eight - I wake up around six times every single night. Nine - I love to write and Ten - I pretend to know what I'm doing way more than I ever actually do.

So just some random things about me that you might not know. Um, what I want you to do now is to use this as a starting point to then try and expand on some of those things. Not all of them,

just some, so if you kinda look back at your list and you wrote down something that was really quick – one thing that came, um, to mind was my first one was 'I'm a Gemini and I said I wonder why I wrote that down because I don't believe in astrology I don't really, like, it's not really something that I'm into. Um, so it's funny that that's the first thing that came to mind. So what we're going to do now is to use this as the first building block for our writing a new piece. You've written down '10 things you wish people knew about me' and there's things that are about you. This is a great start to writing about yourself, so I want you to go and look and see what you can expand upon.

For example, if I went and expanded on Number Six then I'd say, 'I'm a cat person, sadly I'm allergic to cats. I wish I could have a dog but they're just far too happy all the time.' That's me expanding on a little bit what I've said for one, Another one is, I like that example at the top, Number One, 'I'm a Gemini but you don't need to know that because I don't believe in astrology.' Doesn't really matter what they are, this isn't writing a poem, this is just expanding on your list. The writing is not so scary when it's just a list so take another five minutes and then expand upon it. Happy writing

FIVE MINUTE TIMER

CHAPTER 1 - CONCLUSION

Well done on expanding your list I hope you had fun writing them. I want you to take a look at the page there, now what we've been talking about in the first chapter is that, at some point, you're going to write an introduction poem and that might seem impossible to you but looking at the sheet in front of you, you have a full-page, maybe more, of some things that you wish that you wanted to share with people. If you just took that and read it out to a room full of strangers it might not be the introduction poem that you want to write but it's a really good start.

TOP TIP – EXAMINE YOUR COMFORT ZONE

Like I said in the ground rules, you'd never have to share anything what you're not comfortable with but what I do recommend is that you sit with and examine that discomfort and try and figure out where it's coming from. Why is it that you're uncomfortable, uh, sharing your work? If it's because you've written something that is private and you want to keep to yourself, that is completely valid those are your stories you don't have to tell them to anyone. But if it's because you are not too keen on public speaking or you think that someone might make fun of you for what you've written. Those, both those things are linked to confidence and self-assurance and through finding your voice in the programme we're going to do exercises that help build both. Just keep checking in with yourself and trying to keep pushing yourself a little bit further outside your comfort zone every time. This is new, you're trying something different and you're putting yourself out there and that's brave. But above all try not to worry about anything we're going to be doing, this is meant to be a fun and free experience. You trying something new and creating in a different way. This shouldn't be something that stresses you out so try to have as much fun with it as you can. I won't say don't take it too seriously because you should take your abilities and take your voice and take what you have to say seriously. But don't take it so seriously that you're worried about what you're writing. Again quoting a ground rule 'It's not about the poem that comes at the end of it, it's about the process of writing.'

UP NEXT – CHAPTER 2 – YOUR STORIES