



A project to create a 'river of names' of importance to the local community, to be etched into the canal towpath, designed by artist Anoushka Havinden.

Part of Scottish Canals' Stockingfield Bridge project.

Activity –Name Poems & Concrete Poetry

Time: 45 minutes-2 hours. Ages 8 and upwards.

My Real Name

I went with a basket
of crumple-faced baby

to the office where
names are taken.

I brought out my pink
certificate, many times

folded, furry at the edges.
And when the dry-as-ink woman

asked, I opened my mouth,
and my whole family fell from it.

A.M. Havinden

We can be called lots of names, at different times and by different people. We often have stories about our names. Sometimes we're named after someone in our family, someone famous. Sometimes we're called hurtful or bad names. We may name ourselves – we have nicknames, usernames and pseudonyms.

Names are powerful! The Ancient Egyptians used to think that if you knew the name of a demon, you had power over it. The oldest words we know are often names – places, kings and queens, graffiti left by the Vikings and others.

I'd like you to think about names you have or are known by, names you might use for yourself. You don't have to share any names you don't want to – you can be:

anonymous (adj.) from Greek *anonymos* "without a name," from *an-* "without" "name" (from PIE root **no-men-* "name").

- or think up fantasy names for yourself – think of great names from history like ‘Ivor the Boneless’ or ‘Danger Mouse’ or ‘King Ethelred the Unready’ (one of these is made up). What achievements or stories could we unpack from your name? What is hidden in your name? Are there echoes in it? Songs? Puns?

Write down everything you can think of. Can you tell me the story of your name? It can be a true story ... or not. Tell me how you got your name, what it means, and where you think it might take you.

Can you shape this into a poem? It doesn't have to be long – one strong idea or image is enough for a poem. You might like to choose a picture or an object from the story-of-your-name and form your poem into the shape of it. This is called:

Concrete Poetry/Shape Poetry

This is poetry that considers the way the poem looks on the page – maybe the way the poem is shaped or maybe the typeface or lettering. Often the gaps or spaces in the poem are also used as part of the poem, too. What shape would the poem of your name take? A football? A star? Clouds?



Play around with the letters – hand drawing will work best for this, using a pencil to rub out. Try various different forms, vary the size and angles and shapes of the letters. You can use just your name, or you can use a whole poem, or repeat words or letters. You could choose a shape, draw the letters inside or around the shape, and then delete the outline of the shape afterwards.

Find out more:

Ian Hamilton Finlay is a famous Scottish poet who worked a lot with concrete poetry, text and engraving letters.

Alistair Cook's 'film-poem' is a film of a poem by American poet Scott Edward Anderson.

<https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poem/film-poem-10-naming/>

An article on concrete poetry:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/155161/but-is-it-concrete>

NOMINATE A NAME!

Can you think of a name you'd like to see written in the towpath next to the canal?

It can be a place, person, event, thing, wildlife, song title, poem, book title, venue, shop, the name of a dance or even a short phrase that you think is important to the local community. It could be contemporary or from some time in the past.

Please write the name/s here:

And tell me why you would like to see it/them in the River of Names:

THANK YOU!

Find out more about the project on the website:

<https://www.ariverofnames.com>

You can also submit names via the website, or by email.

get in touch at:

ariverofnames@gmail.com

All content produced by Anoushka Havinden, 2021, unless otherwise indicated