

## ‘One-Breath Poem’ by Julia Bird, Creative Director of The Poetry School



Here’s a poem. It’s one of mine...

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### ‘Poem to be Read on One Breath: Blue’

I am bathing my toddler nephew and doing so cautiously as there are so many ways to shopsoil someone else's child in a setting such as this such as scalding or drowning or man o' war attack but still we are having a useful chat about plastic seafood tub toys during which I say octopus and he says doctoper and I say octopus and he says octoper and I say octopus and he says octopus and I see the blue flash flash as the relevant neurone wriggles its tentacles into place and locks them down for ever

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That toddler is eleven now, but that little moment of auntly adoration is one that has stayed with me.

I've written a number of these poems-to-be-read-on-one-breath. I like to compose poems within constraints, whether that's within a traditional form like sonnets or haiku, or bounded by a set of rules that I've made up for myself.

These are the rules of the One-Breath Poem:

The length of the poem has to be no longer than you can read out loud all in one go. By the time you get to the last phrases, you should be running out of puff and delivering your message with breathy urgency. The capacity of your lungs will determine the length of your poem.

- You don't need to worry about regular line lengths or repeating rhyme patterns – this is a very prosy poetic form.
- Keep punctuation to a minimum – you want a headlong rushing effect with no stops and starts.
- You need a key adjective in there, to give yourself the title. In this case it's 'blue', but I've also written emerald, gold and pink poems-to-be-read-on-one-breath.
- The anecdote or feeling that you choose to write about needs to be factually true. Cast your mind back to the moments of high emotion in your life – what story or sensation do you wish to preserve?
- It needs to be in the present tense – the reader wants to be right there in the moment with you.

Inspired to write your own? Send the results to [programme@poetryschool.com](mailto:programme@poetryschool.com) and we'll put a selection up on the Poetry School blog to celebrate National Writing Day.

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### Contribution

We are grateful to **Julia Bird** and **The Poetry School** for contributing this resource to National Writing Day.