

# NEW WRITING NORTH

## Contribute to a collective poem celebrating the natural world in the time of Climate Crisis and Coronavirus

New Writing North and Newcastle University are creating a collective poem about our times and they need your help.

*Murmuration* is an initiative of Linda France, New Writing North and Newcastle University's Climate Writer in Residence. The project's aim is to bring people together in a mass online collaboration. The poem will be an inventory of what really matters, celebrating our love for the natural world at a time of Climate Crisis and Coronavirus.

The concept is inspired by murmurations, the astonishing displays of aerial acrobatics we see in the air in autumn and winter, when great flocks of starlings gather. Flying together, but never colliding, starlings know there is safety in numbers. In a murmuration the birds are protected from predators and cooling temperatures, while they share news and information and enjoy each other's company, arcing, folding and singing together.

In the human realm, creative climate action requires both an individual and a collective response and the starlings' murmuration offers a symbol of what can be achieved through community, collaboration and co-operation.

**Linda France says:** "The first thing people ask when I tell them about my post as Climate Writer is 'What can I do?' The words we use, think with and live by, are vitally important for sharing information and telling new stories of creative resilience, developing alternative ways of living together at a time of crisis. Learning from the starlings, we can raise our wings, our voices in a loud accumulating murmur, and remember to stay in touch with what we love about this miraculous world where we live, sharing our observations, feelings, dreams and wishes. Together we can make something spectacular, far greater than the sum of its parts, an ensemble work of art."

**Anna Disley, Executive Director (Programme and Impact) at New Writing North said:** "At this stressful and uncertain time, one of the positive things that many people have reported is a new appreciation of the natural world; we are looking more closely at what is on our doorstep, noticing more. This initiative aims to capture that appreciation, to use our collective voice to ensure our natural world is cherished and protected. Added to that, we hope it's also an impetus not to revert to pre-lockdown climate damaging practices."

**Professor Sinéad Morrissey, Director of the Newcastle Centre for the Literary Arts at Newcastle University, said:**

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“The really exciting thing about this project is that it’s all about the audience – a reaching out to anyone who would like to take part. An ironic consequence of the COVID-19 crisis is that, even in physical isolation, we can now connect with so many people digitally, without the limitations of time or distance. In other words, a whole new kind of conversation can take place. Be part of it. The launch of Murmuration will form part of [Inside Writing](#): a digital poetry festival running through May June and July hosted by NCLA and featuring some of today’s most exciting poets responding directly to COVID-19.”

You can contribute to the poem by writing between one and three lines of any length celebrating the natural world, beginning with either the phrase ‘*Because I love...*’ or ‘*What if...*’. All the thoughts and impressions sent in will be distilled and curated into a single long poem by Linda France, expressing the collective imagination of all the people who have contributed. Artist Kate Sweeney will bring the lines to life, making an animated film which will draw on our connection with this earth, the natural world and each other at this extraordinary moment in time.

Take part by adding your lines on the [New Writing North website](#) or using #writeoutside on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram by 1 August 2020.

## **Linda France’s writing tips for Murmuration**

Write the first thing that comes into your head or spend a little time mulling it over and crafting it. Either approach is fine. The directness, authenticity and openness of your response is what’s important.

Environmentalist Rachel Carson is always inspiring. She wrote: ‘One way to open your eyes is to ask yourself, ‘What if I had never seen this before? What if I knew I would never see it again?’

Whether outside or indoors, look closely, ask questions and remember, listen, record. Write from your senses, from your heart. Catch what you want to say in sharp, vivid language – be precise rather than abstract. Keep it tight, you only have a few lines – room enough to say what is true and essential.

Just begin with *Because I love...* or *What if...* and see what happens.