



England: Poems from a School

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off

Media type:

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Quite a few collections of poems written by children have been published but none quite like this. Most often, the other collections are the results of competitions, drawing on a number of schools. But in this collection, all the poets are from a single school, the Oxford Spires Academy, a state comprehensive on the outskirts of Oxford, where there are many children from immigrant and asylum-seeking families. These poems are the result not only of the encouragement of teachers but of the work of Kate Clanchy, the book's editor, who has been writer in residence at Oxford Spires since 2009. She has inspired these young poets to draw on their own lives and ways of looking at the world to make poems that look both back and forward and meld the patterns of thought and speech of their past and their parents' lives with the language of their new world. This produces poems that are sometimes angry, often sad, consistently reflective, always considered and crafted, and often strikingly beautiful. For me, they often produce that feeling that I have in meeting a poem in translation, where something new and wonderful seems to emerge from the act of translating, where the sensibility and rhythm of the original language seeps into English and shapes it differently. Some of these poets are, in this sense, their own translators, moving between cultures and inviting us to glimpse ways of seeing and speaking that can then, in some sense, be ours. If England and English are, for many of these poets, only their second home and language, these poems are a profound act of sharing for which we, as readers, can only be grateful. There are many poems I would like to share with you, but here's just the first stanza from Rukiya Khatun's *Silence Itself*: 'When I was at school I wanted a friend./ I feared being alone, not because/I minded the being alone, just/people pitying my loneliness.' For the rest of the poem and all the other poems, you must buy or, better, borrow the book. Yes, borrow the book from your local library, for it may not be there much longer. And with it, that chance to find books will be gone, for any child, but especially for children like these.

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