Hi. My name is Lisette Auton and I do stuff with words in all their forms, including writing stories for children, making theatre and poetry. I’m going to take you on a journey to create a wealth of source material – a big collection of words and phrases – from which you’ll be able to create your own poetry or stories. This is about how words can capture memories: they can make us think about where we come from, and where we belong; our past and our heritage; and how to imagine our futures. How those three things – past, present and future – come together to tell our stories, stories that are vitally important.

I think the best way to use this is to press pause after each of my descriptions, write as much as you can, then press play again. Keep on going like this until we get to the end. There are no right or wrong answers; I don’t care a bit about your spelling or grammar. No-one’s going to see your big splurge of words except you. You could write in single words, lists, full sentences or paragraphs with no full stops – however you want to do it! This is about building a palette of words and phrases that you can use afterwards. You’ll need a pen or a pencil and some paper. You could write left to right as you’d find words in a book, or you could just splodge your words anywhere on the page, whichever works best for you. It’ll all become clear as we go along, I promise. And if you don’t know what to write, write just that! Write ‘I don’t know what to write, I have no idea what she’s going on about, for goodness’ sake! The last time it was like this was in Mrs Jones’ class at school in 1973 when-’ and there you go. You’re writing. Got everything you need? Then let’s begin.

Write your name.

Write all the names you can think of in your family, past and present. Nicknames too.

Pick one of these people from the past; tell me how their voice sounded. Make this up if you don’t know. Was it high-pitched, or gruff?

Write down a secret about them. Make one up if you need to.

What do you think this person would have had in their pockets?

What would they think about the world today?

Let’s think now about places. Where did you grow up? Name the place. Did it have a local name, known only to those who live there?

What did it smell like? Fields or factories nearby? Any tastes associated, any food you ate there?

Describe the place to me as if I’ve never been there: buildings, colours, any greenery? Is it noisy? What does it sound like?

What is your first memory there? Be specific. Use names and colours and textures and sounds.

How do you feel there?

Who else could be there: a friend, a family member, a stranger? Describe them for me.

Did anything strange, or unusual, or funny, or sad, happen there? You’re allowed to use your imagination and make it up.

What is your first memory?

What is your most recent memory?

Think of a space you felt most safe in – is it small or large, manmade, in a forest? Describe it: the smell, the colour, the sound. Name it.

Last one: if you could be anywhere right now, with anybody, where would you be and who would you be with? Describe it for me.

Congratulations, you’re done! If you want to keep on going pause my voice and keep on writing. You could do this again with different choices; you could use this as a method to come up with your own questions. You could get up each morning and write for five minutes each day. I used this technique to write ‘The Leaves Lead to the Sea’, a poem I filmed for the museum. You can watch this and see how it made me think about my childhood memories, for example how I use specific names for places such as Bogey Crash and the Honeymonster’s Cottage.

You could use your pool of words to write a poem! Here are some different ideas. Use a different coloured pen or pencil and do a squiggly line under any word or phrases that interest you, that are different or unusual. If any of these spark you off, do some more writing; it could be that you set a timer for a couple of minutes and write as much as you can in that time. You could use one as a little title for a haiku, which is a little poem of three lines long. It has five syllables in the first line, seven in the second and five in the third. For example, in the filmed poem I use a haiku in the middle, and it goes:

In the third drawer down,

Butterfly in a shoe box,

Couldn’t fly away.

You could use one of the bits that you’ve underlined as an opening line and one as an end line, and try to fill it in, working from front to back. My favourite one is to pick out six phrases that you love, write them out on a piece of paper and cut them up, and then wiggle them around and try to get them in the right order to make a really good poem. Do you need to add any words or phrases, or cut any out?

Most of all, have loads of fun. Remember there are no right answers or wrong answers, and if you’ve enjoyed this, please do keep writing.