

Emi Mahmoud is a poet who won the Individual World Poetry Slam championship in 2015. In this video, Emi recites a powerful and moving poem about the refugee crisis.

Do the preparation task first. Then watch the video and do the exercises. Remember you can read the transcript at any time.

### Preparation

Match the vocabulary with the correct definition and write a–h next to the numbers 1–8.

- |        |              |   |
|--------|--------------|---|
| 1..... | an albatross | a. fine, delicate or difficult to perceive                        |
| 2..... | cerulean     | b. a small piece of something (usually food)                      |
| 3..... | chalk        | c. large numbers of people or animals                             |
| 4..... | a morsel     | d. lines where two pieces of fabric are sewn together             |
| 5..... | seams        | e. a large, white seabird   |
| 6..... | dignity      | f. a deep, sky-blue colour  |
| 7..... | hordes       | g. a white substance made into sticks for writing on a blackboard |
| 8..... | subtle       | h. the quality of being worthy of honour and respect              |

### 1. Check your understanding: ordering

Write a number (1–8) to put these sentences in order.

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| ..... | <p>If I had the power, I would have papier mâchéd those contracts; I would have lined the walls with paper cup lights; I would have painted the ceiling cerulean so even the smallest of palms could reach for the sky.</p> <p>I would have lined entire rooms with books and kitchens with the warmest pies.</p> <p>I would have carpeted camps with chalk, to build a home, to make a refuge, to bring the dignity back into a concrete oasis.</p> <p>I would have built a camp that is a call to prayer where a man who is carried in can leave walking.</p> <p>This is what I saw on Lesvos island.</p> |
| ..... | <p>Floating rubber albatrosses, box-figured crows hug the horizon in the bitter cold.</p> <p>When an island becomes a door, who will answer?</p> <p>If enough eyes see a body in the water and no hands reach out to rescue her, did she really die?</p>  |
| ..... | <p>And I can say that a village can stand all together because a woman willed it so.</p>  |
| ..... | <p>I've seen how paperwork can divide families, separating mother and father with the stroke of a pen.</p> <p>How firm handshakes can unravel entire nations when the stage is big enough.</p>  |

.....	This time, when the world left infants to take their first steps at the edge of humanity; when the seams broke and the threads lay society bare; the eyes came and the helping hands followed. Imagine rivers full of people carrying people on their backs. Imagine shores covered in footprints and wheelchair tracks, the passion it takes to swallow the wind, kiss the October sea and meet the boats.
.....	Safe passage begins with asking the questions no one will dare to utter, and becoming the answer no one could possibly imagine.
.....	The sun melting clouds across our vision, as the first birds spiralled brilliantly toward the Aegean shore. To go from bird watching to boat watching in Greece is to witness the world unfurl. I was told of days when the birds came in hordes, broken-winged and heaving, spilling forth fifty to eighty hatchlings at a time each broken shell another person seeking rest.
.....	I met a woman, her mother and her son all under the subtle shade of a tent. Three generations held together in one morsel of time.
.....	The life of a refugee is counted in moments. In this moment we were bird watching on Lesvos Island.
.....	Because, when a child is born in the context of war, this is how you unravel the world to them. How you unveil music to their ears. I've stood on both sides now and I can say that on Lesvos the cats are white with brown spots because a child's painting showed me so. I can say that life-jacket bags are in style because a boy named Suhaib told me so.

## 2. Check your understanding: matching

Match the lines from the poem with what they represent. Write a–f next to the numbers 1–6.

- |        |   |                        |
|--------|---|------------------------|
| 1..... | 'a door, who will answer?'  | a. people              |
| 2..... | 'entire room (lined) with books and kitchens with the warmest pies' | b. life-jackets        |
| 3..... | 'floating rubber albatrosses'                                       | c. the island          |
| 4..... | 'a concrete oasis'  | d. humanity            |
| 5..... | 'birds ... in hordes, broken winged and heaving'                    | e. a refugee camp      |
| 6..... | '... when the seams broke and the threads lay society bare'         | f. the feeling of home |

### Discussion

Do you like the poem?

How do you feel when you listen to it?