

# EXPRESS YOURSELF

**A CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH  
POETRY COMPETITION**

**POEM PACK**

**AWARE**  
OVERCOMING DEPRESSION.  
CHANGING LIVES.

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## DEAR ALL PRINCIPALS & TEACHERS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Thank you for your interest in AWARE NI's mental health poetry competition. We are driven by a powerful belief in early intervention. This campaign is a dedicated investment in the children of our community—the future of our nation—encouraging them to prioritize their mental health, to know they are never alone, and to feel empowered to speak openly about what's going on inside their minds. Express Yourself is a fun, empowering campaign that encourages children to creatively express the worries and concerns they carry, fostering openness and resilience for a brighter future!

Mental health problems affect 1 in 8 young people in Northern Ireland ([hscni.net](http://hscni.net)), however, 70% of children and young people who experience a mental health problem have not had appropriate interventions at a young age (Mental Health Foundation). There is a need to educate and enable children to build resilience and learn about mental health at a younger age, so they are better equipped to manage the challenges of life when they get older.

We want to encourage young people to talk about their feelings. Many parents will have picked up on their children's concerns and most of the time it is not when you ask them directly. Their real feelings and worries often sneak out at the strangest times!

The competition will allow pupils to express their thoughts and feelings through creative writing. It will encourage young people to think engagingly and creatively about their experiences. We hope that this activity will add value to all of our lives, and allow you and your colleagues to also pause to check in on what is going on inside your mind.

We'll also be taking some of our favourite poems and turning them into a mental health resource book for children. The book will be sent out to all partaking schools, community libraries and of course, there will be prizes for the winning school and students!

## COMPETITION DETAILS

This competition is open only to Primary 6 and Primary 7 pupils and we will permit up to 2 entries per school. Our friend and talented singer, Isla McManus (@IslaLovesToSing), will be selecting the winning poem! Plus, the winning school will receive a special visit and live performance from Isla herself.



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**ENTRIES OPEN:**  
3rd February 2025.



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**CLOSING DATE FOR SUBMISSIONS:**  
4pm on 28th February 2025

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You can submit your poems online at [www.aware-ni.org/express-yourself](http://www.aware-ni.org/express-yourself) from 3rd February 2025.

We hope this pack will give you all of the tools you need to support your pupils with their submissions but if you have any questions at all, please get in touch with us via email at [poems@aware-ni.org](mailto:poems@aware-ni.org).

-Team AWARE NI.

# How to start a conversation with your classroom about mental health

## ★ Top Tips



## Activity Ideas

### A Worry Box

Set up a private worry box where children can post notes about any worries they have. Keep the box in a discreet spot so they can share concerns without others seeing.



### Grow something



Growing a plant teaches children how caring for something is like caring for their mental health. Plants need water and sunlight to thrive—just like we need positive thoughts, learning, and time outside to feel our best.

### Make stress balls



Hold a creative session where kids make stress balls with balloons, flour, and water. They can add faces to show different emotions, giving them a fun way to learn about feelings and release stress.

## Use open questions

“What did you enjoy most about yesterday?”

and

“What did you not enjoy about yesterday and why?”



### ★ Top Tip

When children share feelings, show you're listening by gently repeating what they say to validate their emotions. Use phrases like, "I'd feel sad too—it's okay to feel that way." Reassure them it is safe to share, ideally one-on-one.

## More Activity Ideas

### Create a mental wellbeing wall

Print out positive messages and give them to the children to create visuals for. Then pin them up in a visible place in your classroom.



“I can do whatever I set my mind to.”

“I believe in myself and in what I am capable of doing.”

“There is no one better to be than me.”

### A sticker chart



Each child can pick an emoji sticker that represents how they are feeling that day. This could start conversations.



## Don't fix it!

When a child discloses a problem to you don't try to fix it for them. Instead, work with them to help them come up with a solution.

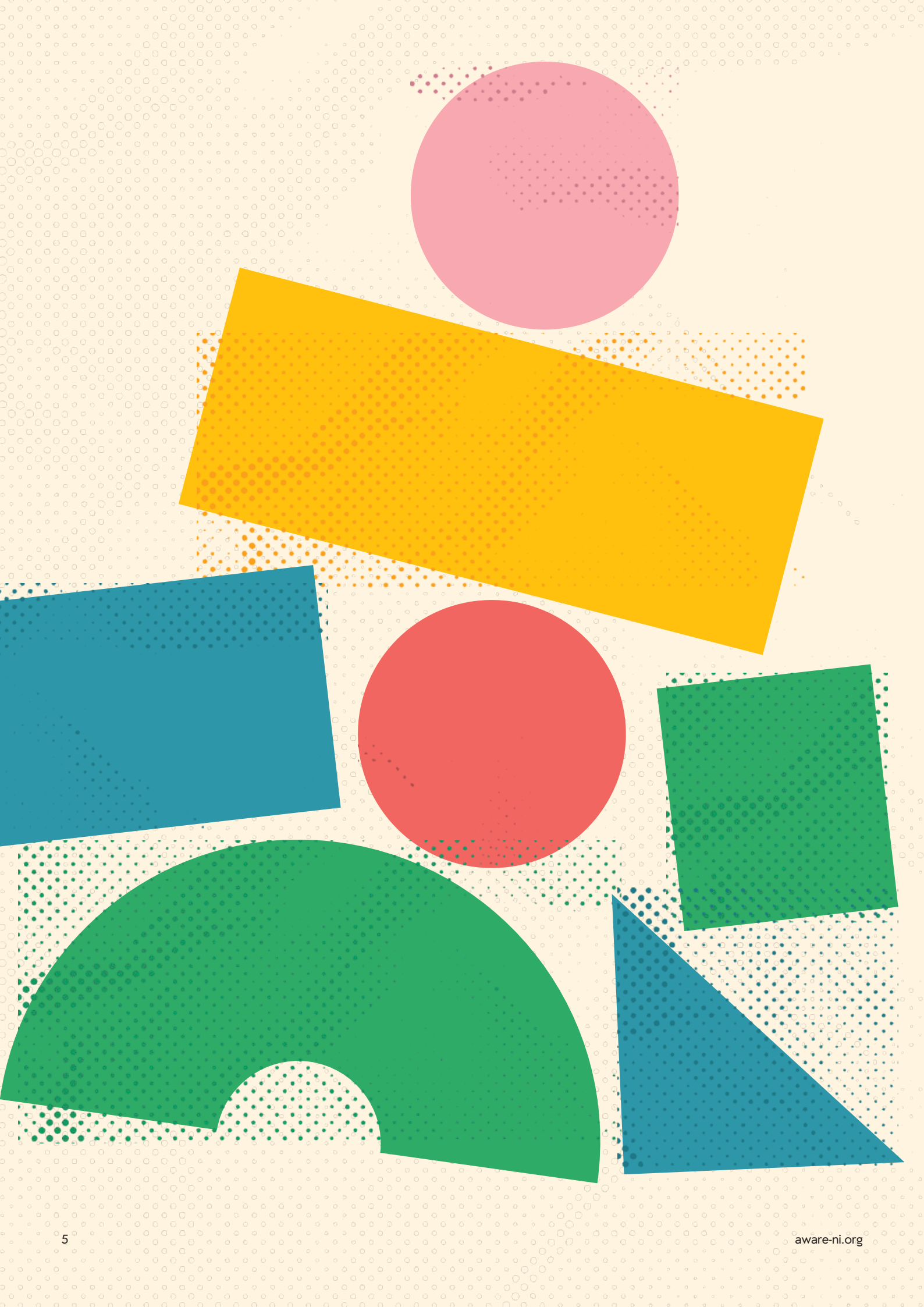
solution.

This will

empower

a child and teaches them to know they have the ability to solve their own problems!





# WELCOME TO AWARE NI'S 'EXPRESS YOURSELF' POEM PACK!

## HIYA!

We are so pleased you are interested in taking part in our mental health poetry competition!

We all have thoughts and feelings that can sometimes make us feel overwhelmed. Writing poetry about those feelings can help lighten the load and let them out. It also helps you connect with others who might feel the same way, so you know you're not alone. That's why we've created a super fun competition where you can learn all about the different types of poetry and have the chance to write an exciting poem to share with your friends and family!

Inside this pack, you will find some tips and tricks to help you write the best poem ever!

Don't worry if this isn't something you have done before, we are here with you every step of the way.

If writing isn't your thing, that's okay too. We've got some fun worksheets for you to work on before creating your masterpiece!

By taking part in this competition you have the chance to win some fantastic prizes...

## 1ST PRIZE

- £150 Amazon Gift Voucher
- A personal visit and performance from Isla for the winning school.
- A free 6-week Paws B Mindfulness course delivered to the class of the winning pupil.
- Poem will be featured at the beginning of our beautifully illustrated 'Express Yourself' poetry book.

## 2ND PRIZE

- £100 Amazon Voucher.
- Poem will be featured at the beginning of our beautifully illustrated 'Express Yourself' poetry book.

## 3RD PRIZE

- £50 Amazon Gift Voucher
- Poem will be featured at the beginning of our beautifully illustrated 'Express Yourself' poetry book.

Good luck!



Meet our group of AWARE Bots who know exactly how it feels to be worried, nervous or scared about the future. The AWARE Bots are here to let you know it's okay to not be okay.



### → MEET SASSY SUZIE

Suzie is our sassy fire queen! The popular one in class who everyone looks up to. Suzie is bubbly, happy and always has a smile on her face. But when Suzie goes home, sometimes she feels sad... sometimes she cries... but she would never tell her friends that!



### → MEET TALKATIVE TIM

Tim loves a chat! He's always telling funny stories and making his friends and teachers laugh. But Tim struggles with his school work and this can make him upset and sometimes he loses his temper. He doesn't mean to be rude and knows he shouldn't lash out, but finds it hard to cope with school life.



### → MEET BUSY BRIAN

Brian doesn't stop! He is part of anything and everything, from after school clubs, to music lessons and Saturday Football! Although Brian loves being around people, he often feels lonely and sometimes feels like he doesn't fit in with the others.



### → MEET GENTLE GEORGIA

Georgia is kind and caring but likes to keep to herself. She doesn't say much in class. She keeps her friends close but finds it hard being in big groups. She gets nervous and doesn't like to speak up in class. Georgia fears what others think of her and would often worry that she is not like the other children.

**Do any of our AWARE Bots sound familiar to you? Although our AWARE Bots are all different, like us, they all have mental health. As well as having times when they feel happy, they also go through times when they feel worried, nervous or scared as well.**

**When you hear the words “mental health” what do you think of?**

Maybe words like “nuts” or “crazy” come to mind? There are probably a lot of people who think the same.

But the word “mental” simply means your mind and how you think and feel. Mental health is about how healthy your mind is.

It’s about your thoughts, moods and how you deal with the ‘ups and downs’ of life. Good mental health doesn’t mean you feel happy all of the time, that’s impossible! It means you enjoy life, but you can sometimes feel sad or worried too. Having good mental health means you know what you can do to make yourself feel better.

If you are going through similar feelings to the AWARE Bots this isn’t something you can switch off, but there are small steps you can take to help yourself.

## **AWARE'S TOP TIPS FOR POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH**

### **TALK ABOUT IT:**

Like our friend, Talkative Tim, he loves to chat but would be scared to tell his friends or family if he is feeling low. If you're feeling like Tim, try to tell your parents or teacher about how you're feeling. This will help you understand what you are going through and make you feel less on your own.

### **SPEND TIME WITH YOUR FRIENDS:**

If you're feeling down like Sassy Suzie, you may not want to talk to your friends but it's really important to try and keep in touch even if it's for a few minutes each day.

### **BE MINDFUL:**

If you are feeling nervous and worried like Gentle Georgia, take a minute to be by yourself. Practice this simple breathing exercise...

**A. BREATHE IN FOR 4 SECONDS**

**B. HOLD FOR 7 SECONDS**

**C. BREATHE OUT FOR 8 SECONDS**

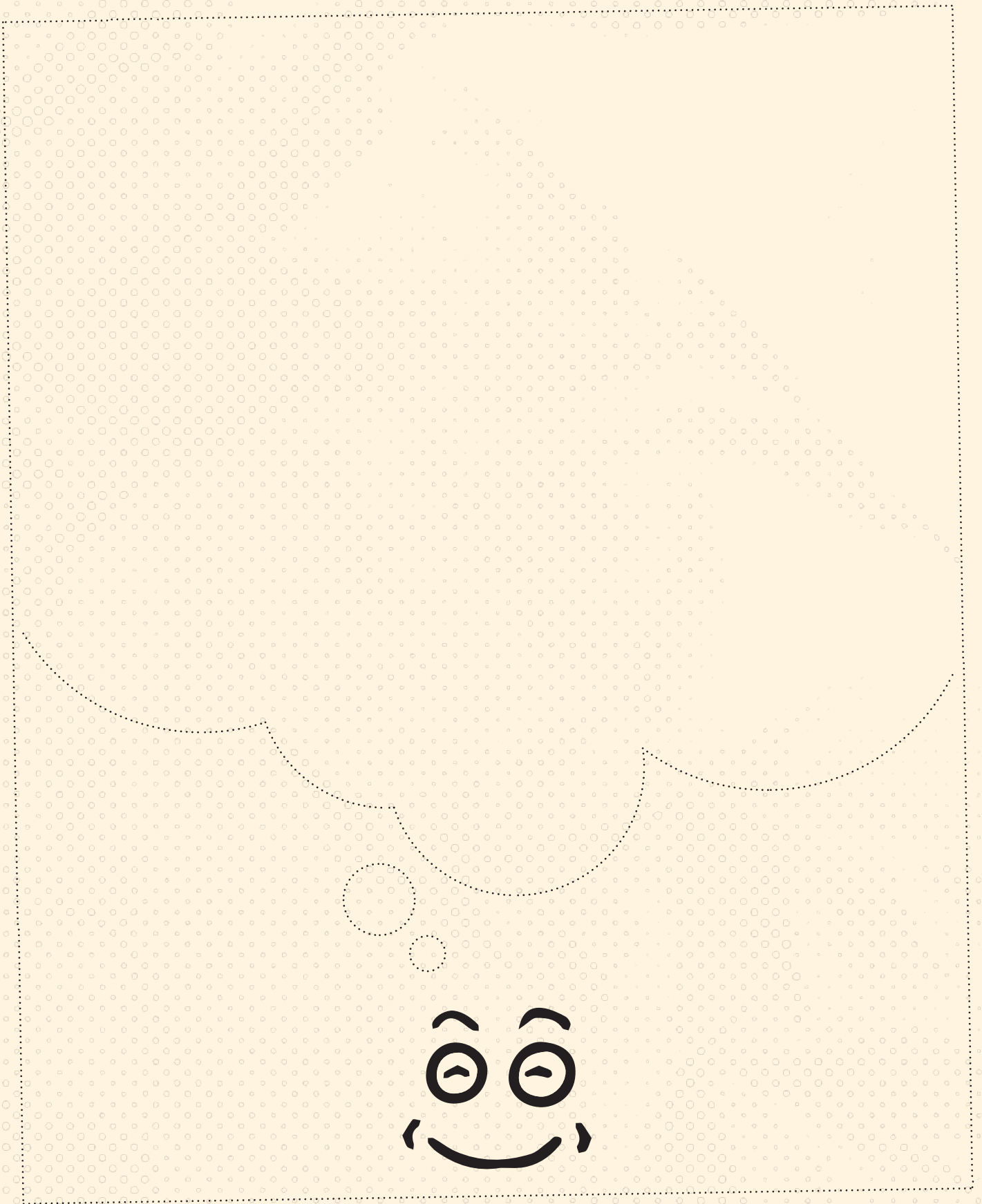
Repeat this a few times and you will notice you'll feel a lot more relaxed!

### **KEEP ACTIVE:**

Try to keep your body moving, and do something you enjoy! Like Busy Brian, it could be football, hockey, running, PE or even playing on the street with your friends!

### **KEEP LEARNING:**

There are lots of ways we can learn to look after our mental health. One of these ways is practising what we call 'Mindfulness'. AWARE offers a Mindfulness course for P6 & P7 pupils called 'Paws b' that can be delivered to your class! Ask your teacher to contact [training@aware-ni.org](mailto:training@aware-ni.org)



We know that life can make you feel all sorts of things, sometimes even all at once! You might feel happy, worried, excited, scared, or even sad. We'd love for you to take a moment to think about the past year and all the different feelings you've experienced.

Can you draw a picture that sums up the past year and what you've learned? You could draw memories from the time you spent with family and friends, or maybe highlight a special moment that stands out to you the most. Let your creativity shine and express those feelings through your artwork!

# WHAT IS A POEM?

A poem is a piece of writing that expresses ideas and feelings through imaginative language.

People have been writing poems for thousands of years. A person who writes poetry is called a poet.

Many poems have words or phrases that sound good together when they are read aloud.

Most poems for children rhyme or they have rhythm (just like music) or repetition. But a poem doesn't have to rhyme!

There are many different types of poetry, here's some you might know...

## NARRATIVE POEMS

Tell a story. The defining feature of a narrative poem is its plot. Narrative poems feature an entire story often told by one narrator. See an example narrative poem below:

---

### WHAT HAS YOUR MIND BEEN SAYING?

When I pause and have a listen  
to what's going on in my mind  
There are some of my thoughts  
That I'd rather leave behind.

I wish I could talk to my worry  
And tell it to get out of my brain  
But when I tell my teacher what it  
is saying  
Sometimes I feel better again.

I wish I could talk to my sadness  
And tell it to go far far away  
But then I remember I'm human  
So it's okay not to be okay.

---

by AWARE

## LYRICAL POEMS

Did you know... song lyrics can be a form of poetry too? Many singers will use poetry techniques to create their music and powerfully share their emotions and feelings! Check out Jessie J's song "Who you are" on YouTube and look at how the lyrics rhyme like a poem...

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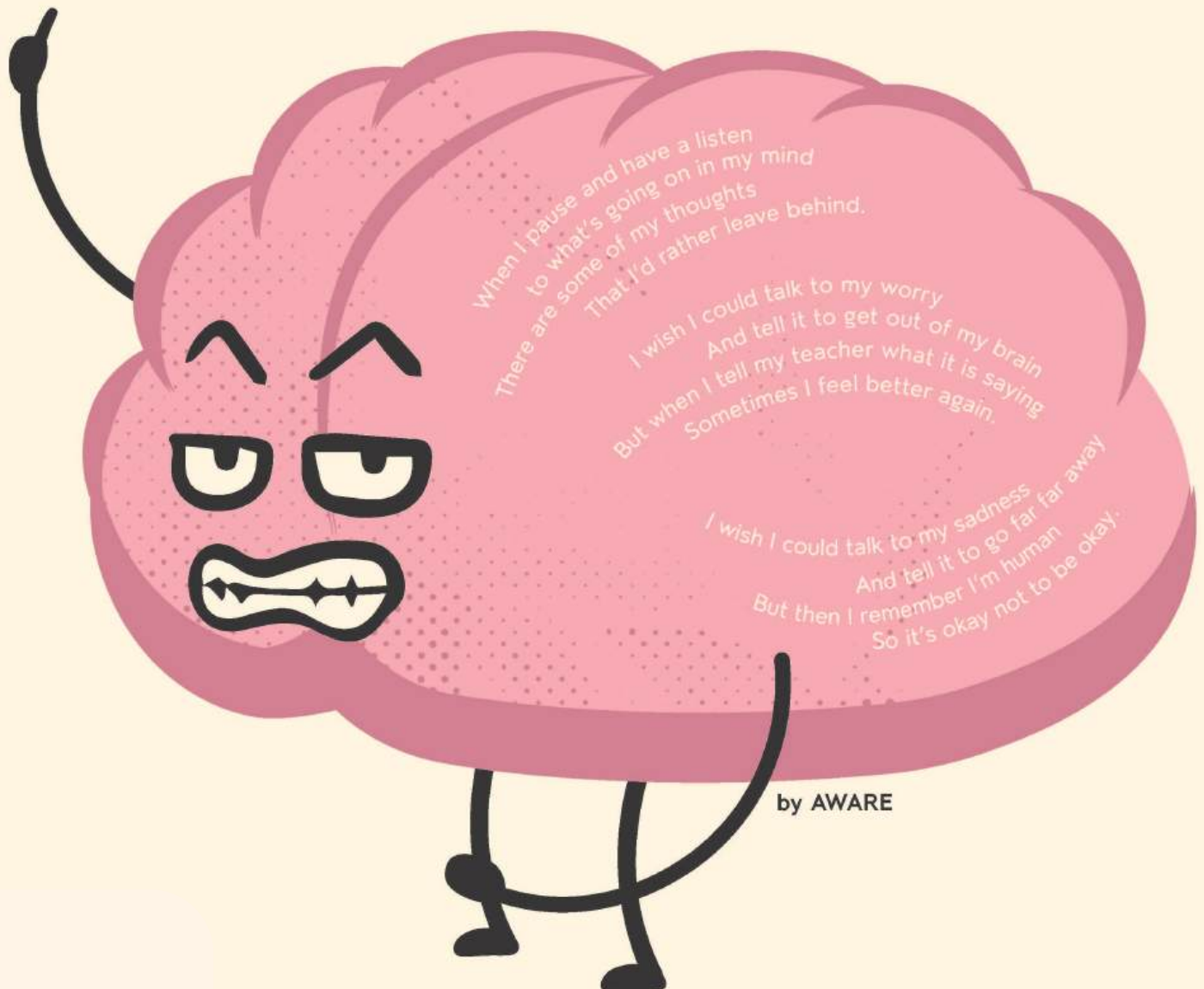
It's okay not to be okay  
Sometimes it's hard  
To follow your heart  
Tears don't mean you're losing  
Everybody's bruising  
Just be true to who you are  
There's nothing wrong with who you are

---

What's your favourite song? Can you look at the lyrics and see what features of poetry stand out?

## SHAPE POEMS OR CONCRETE POEMS

Shape poems are poems arranged around a shape related to the topic you are writing about. You could write a poem about your mind in the shape of a brain. See example below:



## ACROSTIC POEMS

When you look at the first letters of each line of the poem, they spell out a word vertically. This word links to the subject of the poem. It doesn't have to be the first letter that stands out – it could be the last letter of each line or a letter in the middle. Also, acrostic poems don't have to rhyme! Here's an example:



## HAIKU POEMS

Haiku poems are Japanese poems. They don't have to rhyme, but some do. Haikus always have three lines. Line 1 has 5 syllables, line 2 has 7 syllables, and line 3 has 5 syllables:

---

We are all locked in  
Outside, corona runs free.  
Free as the wind blows.

---

Credit: <https://theday.co.uk/stories/haiku-poetry-collection-documents-corona-blues>

## LIMERICKS

Limericks are short, funny poems with five lines. They always start with the words "There was a..." and end in a silly way. Lines 1, 2 and 5 rhyme with each other, and lines 3 and 4 rhyme too.

---

There once was a wonderful nurse  
Who put up with shouting and worse  
But she remained stoic  
And somewhat heroic  
While smiling and never once terse.

---

Credit: Alisa Bryce

### FACT TIME:

Syllables are the sounds that make up words. For example, "Mental" has two syllables and "Health" has one syllable. When you put these together, that's 3 syllables!

Men-tal – two syllables  
Health – one syllable.



# WRITING A POEM

Check out some of our top tips to help you write your poem for AWARE NI's poetry competition.



## RHYMING

To make your poem rhyme, the words at end of the lines should sound the same or very similar, e.g. kind and mind. Not all poems rhyme, but it's a fun way to get started with poetry.

When two lines of poetry rhyme with each other, it's called a rhyming couplet.

Here's an example:

---

Twinkle, twinkle little **star**  
How I wonder what you **are**

---

## ALLITERATION

This means using lots of words that start with the same letter or sound. Alliteration sounds good when you read it out and it gives your poem rhythm. For example,

---

Peter **P**iper **p**icked a **p**epper

---

## ASSONANCE

This is similar to alliteration, but instead of repeating the letter at the start of each word, you repeat similar sounding vowels inside the words. This is another good way to give your poem rhythm. For example,

---

**book**, **look**, **took**

---

## REPETITION

You can repeat the same word, phrase or even line to get your idea across or to give your poem a more dramatic ending. For example,

---

Alex didn't like to talk  
Alex didn't like to smile  
Alex didn't like to hug  
Alex liked to be by himself  
Until one day...  
He told his teacher how he felt inside  
and a little while later...  
Alex did talk  
Alex did smile  
Alex did hug

---

## METAPHORS

Metaphors are used widely in poetry. When you use a metaphor, rather than saying something is 'like' another thing, you say it is that thing. For instance, you might say someone is a "**ray of sunshine**" which would be a metaphor.

## PERSONIFICATION

In poems, you can use your imagination to bring objects or animals to life and describe them like you would describe a human for example,

---

Jack heard the last piece  
of pie calling his name.

---

Can you think of some words to rhyme  
with the following?

**KIND**

---

**SAD**

---

**HOPE**

---

**WORRY**

---

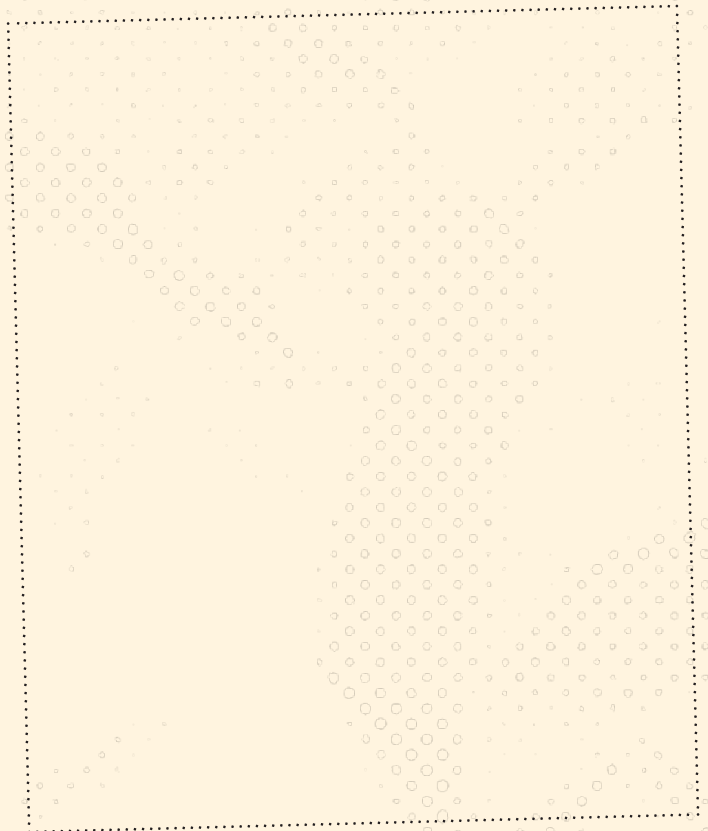
**AFRAID**

---

**LOVE**

---

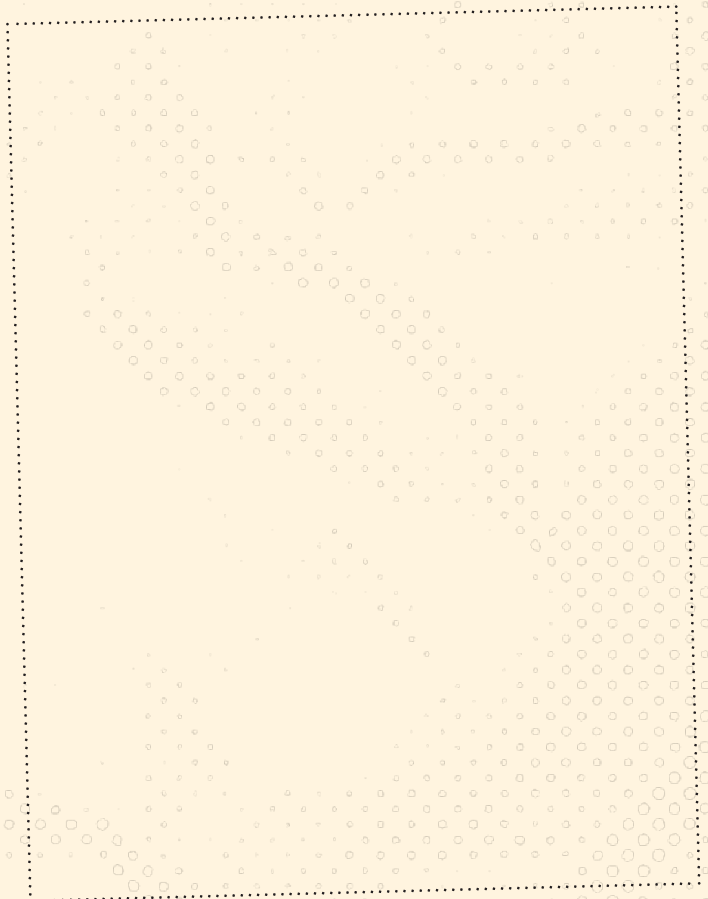
Have you had any worries or fears this year?  
Write your feelings down in the box below.



What lessons have you learned in the past year?  
List them in the box below.



What has made you happy this year?  
Write your happy thoughts in the box below.



Writing a poem about **mental health** can help you express your feelings. Here are some ideas to get you started:

## Dealing with Change



How do you handle things when they change unexpectedly?

## Feeling Alone



Write about what it feels like to be lonely and how you find comfort.

## Worrying



How do you cope when you feel nervous or worried?

## Finding Hope



What makes you feel hopeful or strong when things get tough?

## Self-care



What do you do to take care of your mind and body?

## Nature



How does spending time outside make you feel peaceful?

## Asking for help



Why is it brave to ask for help when you need it?



Write about how talking to someone helps you feel better.

## Talking About Your Feelings



Use these ideas to write a poem that shows how you're feeling. Have fun and be creative!

## HONESTY

Keeping things bottled up can be really exhausting. And sometimes our minds can be like bullies and tell us things about ourselves that aren't true. If you open up about how you have been really feeling, to someone that you trust, you will allow them the chance to help assure and encourage you.

## KINDNESS

Being kind will make you and others feel good, which contributes to positive mental health! Think about how giving or receiving kindness has made you feel recently.

## WORRIES & FEARS

Feeling worried or scared is completely normal, and it usually happens because of something specific. But sometimes, we feel worried and aren't sure what's causing it. If that's how you're feeling, try spending some time thinking about what's making you feel this way. Talking to a friend or family member you trust can help you figure it out. You could also try writing down what you're worried about and what makes you feel calm and happy. Doing this can help you find ways to feel better and handle those worries.

## GRATITUDE (FEELING THANKFUL)

In life, there's always something to be thankful for! Taking a moment to think about what makes you happy can help lift your mood. Maybe you're thankful for your family, friends, or pets. Or perhaps you're thankful for where you live – Northern Ireland has beautiful beaches and forests that are so nice to visit. Spend some time thinking about all the things you're grateful for and write them down. It can help you feel happy and remind you of all the good things in your life.

## HOPE

What are you hopeful for in the future?  
What makes you happy?  
How does thinking positively affect your mood?

Now you've learned what a poem is, the different types of poems and how you might structure your poem, we think you're ready to get started!

We have provided a template for you to write your poem focused on mental health! Please feel free to decorate your poem with drawings if you like! Don't forget... our friend Isla McManus will be choosing the final winner so try to put in your best effort!

**NAME**

**CLASS**

A large rectangular area defined by a dotted border, intended for writing a poem. The background of the entire page is a light gray pattern of small, faint circles.

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