

# Delicate Sight

Creative ideas in the dark  
For use at home or in the classroom

A Delicate Sight

*Sam Winston*

Authors

*Raymond Antrobus*

*Bernardine Evaristo*

*Don Paterson*

*Max Porter*

Video

Poems

Drawing

Questions & Activities

Ages 14+

Suitable for younger people if led by  
an adult

Themes:

Heightened Senses, Darkness, Identity,  
Imagination, Time, Sensory Reduction

# ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

A Delicate Sight uses darkness, closed books, unseen pictures and partially heard songs to explore the promise of the imagination.

Initially a group of artists were asked to do darkness residencies, in which they spent a period of time in complete blackout.

From their experience they generated drawings, texts and films inspired by their time in the dark. A Delicate Sight showcases their work and also invites you to explore your own world of heightened senses.

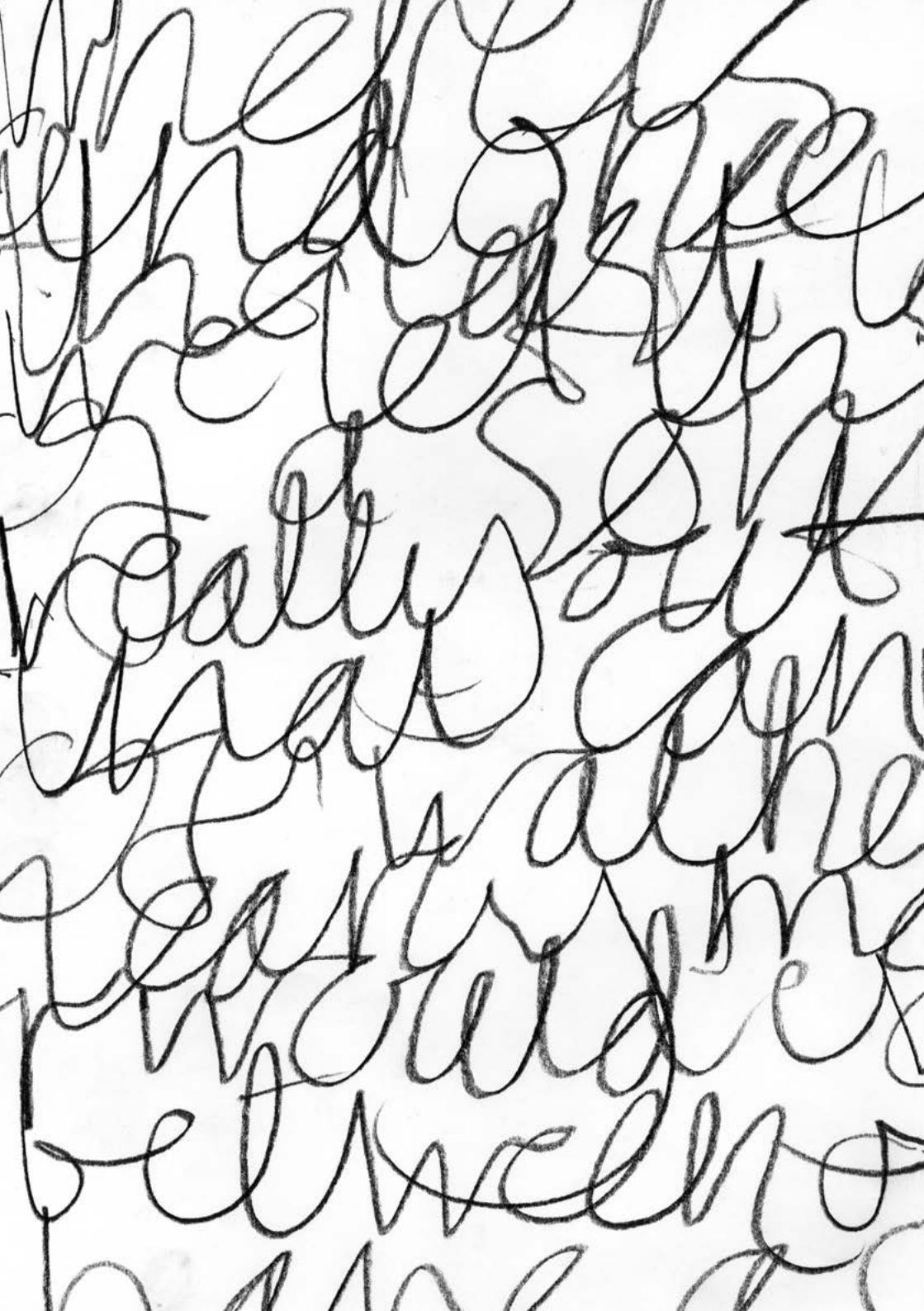


"In 2015 I started doing a series of drawings in total blackout because I had become interested in how we form relationships to what we can't see. I would set up the studio a week at a time in darkness and produce a series of drawings whilst not knowing how they were progressing.

In 2019 I spent a month living in darkness whilst making a series of artworks. Partly as a way to escape screen culture but also as a way to experience a prolonged period of imagination.

I also asked Raymond Antrobus, Bernardine Evaristo, Don Paterson and Max Porter to spend time in the dark and write something inspired by their own experiences."

*Sam Winston*



# CONTENTS

To mirror the experience of artist Sam Winston, participants are encouraged to go on their own journey into darkness.

*NOTE: It is advised that teachers, parents or carers read through this Resource Pack and complete any tasks before students, to ensure that everyone is comfortable with the experience of going into the dark.*

## 1: BEFORE THE DARK

Objectives: Explore key themes and ideas behind the exhibition; plan and prepare your Darkness Exercise.

## 2: IN THE DARK

Objectives: Immerse yourself in darkness and tune into your senses; sketch a drawing with accompanying notes.

## 3: AFTER THE DARK

Objectives: Write a poem inspired by your Darkness Project; rest and reflect on your experiences.



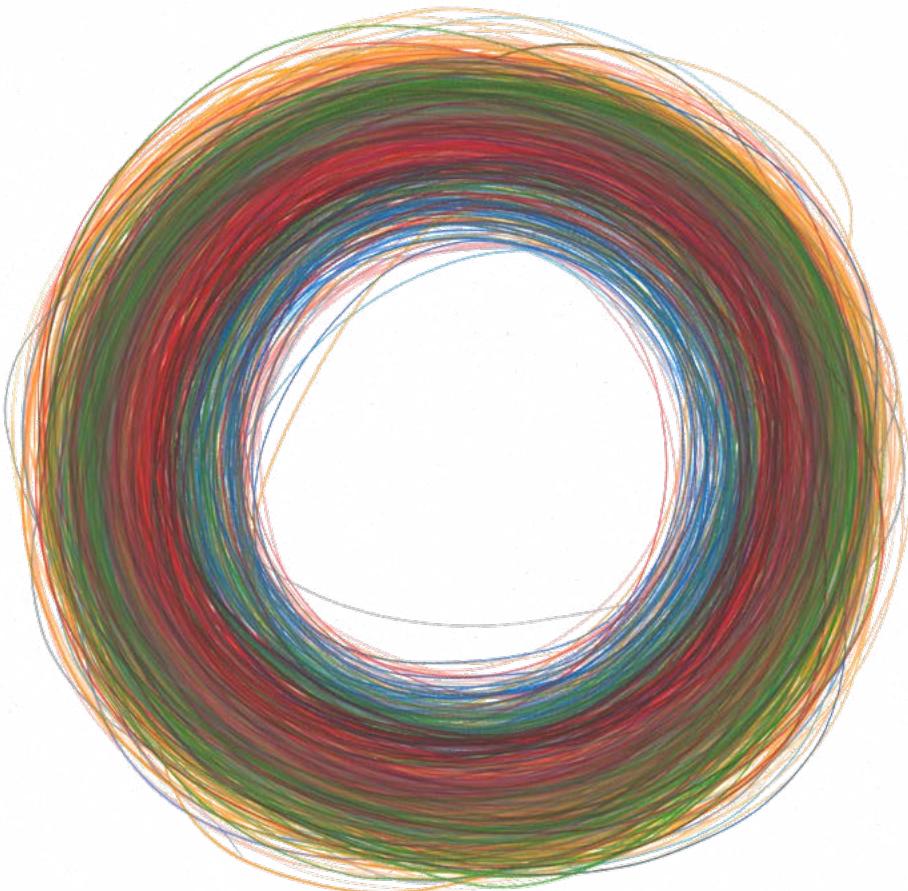
"I decided to call the exhibition 'a delicate sight' in reference to what happens once your sight returns after a long period of darkness.

In Optometry they call this 'dark adaptation' and it's about the eye's ability to adjust to various levels of light.

I found in the period from going from dark to light there is an interesting window of time in which you can see things very differently."

*Sam Winston*

BEFORE  
THE  
DARK



“Of most importance to me is the, kind of, recapturing of the human, now ... just being the fact of a human being breathing in a dark room”

*Max Porter*

## REFLECT

Take a moment to think about all of the different forms of media and screen stimulation that you experience in one day, either at home, at school or in another environment. Make some notes about how each thing that you identify affects your life.

You might want to use the following categories before adding your own:

- Smart phone
- Social Media (Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter)
- Television
- 24-hour news

## IMAGINE

If all forms of media and external stimulation suddenly stopped...

- What might be gained in your daily life?
- How might the reduction of sensory overload encourage creativity?
- How might removing distractions free up your imagination?
- How might removing yourself from the ‘noise’ of modern life be a challenge?
- What might happen to your concept of time?

## CREATE

A safe space for your Darkness Project. Consider the layout of the room you will use, and make notes of any adjustments needed. You might want to draw a plan for your safe space or create a sketch of the area, including any notes.

For example, you could close the curtains, source a blindfold, or create a den. Try to ensure the space is as empty as possible except for a couple of sheets of paper and pencil to draw and write with.

*NOTE. Please refer to page 23 for important advice about how to complete this project in the safest and most constructive way.*



## DISCOVER

Watch the shorter version of Sam's video, making a few notes about key ideas or quotes that you find interesting.



<https://vimeo.com/414700509>

Then, discuss the quote below with a friend or family member:

“We often go looking for imagination within books or literature or music ... why don't we go looking for imagination inward-facing? Why is imagination a consumptive thing?”

*Sam Winston*

Discussion points:

- *What do you think Sam means by this?*
- *To what extent do you identify with the point he is making?*
- *How do you and your friend or family member's views differ?*
- *Explore what common ground you share.*

## REFLECT 2

On the following ideas and themes in A Delicate Sight:

- *Identity*
- *The imagination*
- *The unnoticed*
- *Stillness*

Can you think of three more themes, ideas, or feelings that resonate with you?

Consider also: what preconceived ideas do we have about ‘darkness’? Why are they largely negative? Why is it interesting to challenge these preconceptions?

Before going into the dark, create a 2–3 minute video diary in which you consider your expectations about going into darkness. Think about what darkness means to you. What do you associate with it? What do you hope to explore while ‘in the dark’?

IN  
THE  
DARK



“Here’s an idea you can sit in... you know, like with any artist, you give them something that’s abstract enough, but simple and you immediately like – ohh – possibility possibility possibility – you know it’s just boundless...”

Raymond Antrobus

## Notes for safely completing the Darkness Exercise

When completing the Darkness Exercise we recommend a buddy to help you set up your space and also have them check in on you throughout the exercise.

Make sure the room is free from hazards and you have a safe comfortable position to sit and draw / write in. If space allows - also have a space in which to stretch out or lie down, possibly even explore.

Consider lowering the lights and closing the curtains. If you're comfortable being without sight we recommend using an eye-mask or blindfold (scarves can work, but something like a complete blackout / mindfold sleep mask is ideal).

You will need sheets of paper and something to write and draw with. Depending on your comfort levels, the longer you are able to explore this world of other senses, the more interesting the experience becomes.

If it feels like a challenge, perhaps 5 to 10 minutes is enough. If you are comfortable and interested in making in the dark, 30 minutes to an hour is perfectly suitable. Perhaps have your buddy be the timekeeper. Your sense of time can certainly change without sight.

*NOTE: If at any point during the experience you become anxious, simply remove your blindfold.*

Turn off your phone before starting.  
Go slowly and have fun.

## IMAGINE

Rather than the absence of things, the darkness is an opportunity to allow something new to come to forefront.

Before going into the dark, see if you can draw your breath. Try these calming exercises to help you.



<https://vimeo.com/414835979>



## EXPERIENCE 1 — WITHOUT SIGHT

Remember, you can remain in your safe space for as long or as little time as you like; this project isn't about the longevity of time spent in the dark.

When you're ready and with the help of your buddy (starting a timer), begin your time without sight.

Take some time to get used to being without sight. Try to make the masks as dark as you can. Give yourself a moment of quiet.

You could initially start by tracking the sounds inside and outside the room – noting down what you can hear and what you can deduce from the soundscape.

Continue writing – write about anything – move out beyond your senses. If you become distracted then great, write about that.

If you daydream – also great – take notes. All of this is useful and welcome.

Try listening to a piece of music.

## EXPERIENCE 2 — CREATE

Using your sense of touch and also with the help of your visual memory, see if you can draw the room in as much detail as possible.

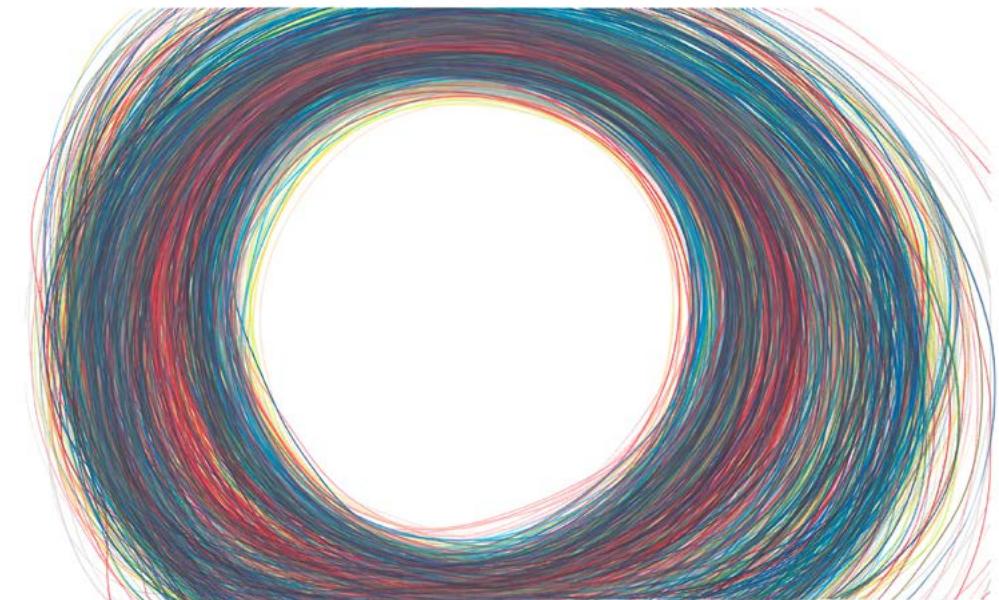
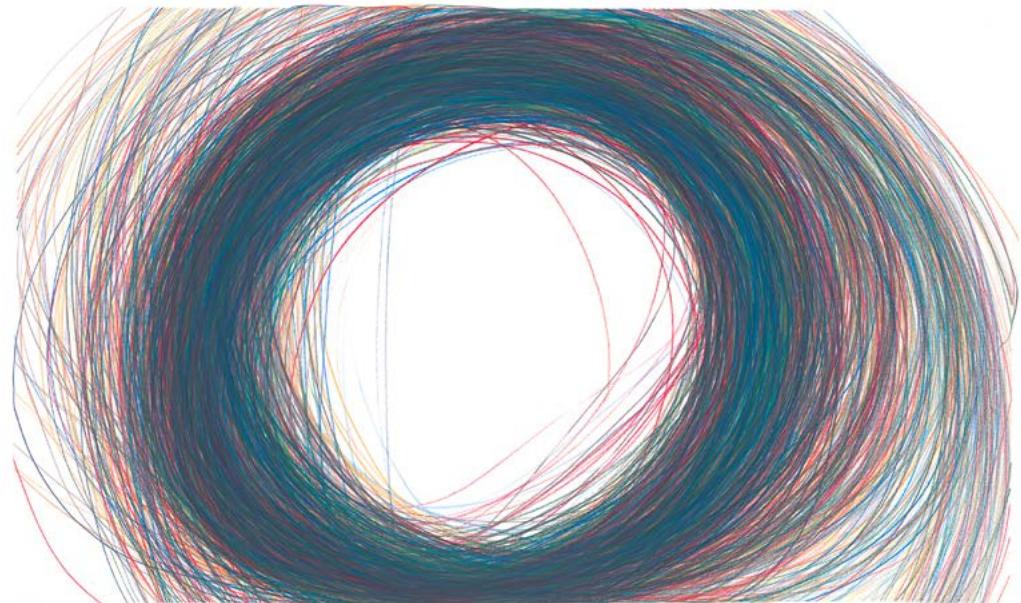
Still without sight, draw a self-portrait as accurately as possible, followed by a self-portrait in either a humorous or fantastical way.

Or, create a drawing of anything you like (for example a place, person, your feelings, a representation of your sensory experience).

Write notes describing what you've drawn. When you have finished, turn your drawing over and try not to look at it until later on.

Once you've been in the dark for some time, make a list of how many things you now notice that you didn't when you first started.

After some time and you're comfortable in the dark – simply allowing your body and mind to be in the space whilst doing nothing. Do this for as long as you like.





### EXPERIENCE 3 — RETURNING TO SIGHT

If you've have been in the dark for some time the transition to looking at direct light can be pronounced.

Let light back in slowly and give yourself plenty of time to let your vision adjust naturally. If you are especially light sensitive avoid looking directly into daylight or direct light for a minute or so.

The transition back to looking is very much an intended part of the project. Pay extra special attention to how you see things after time without sight. If you have a view from a window now would also be a good time to look around.

## DISCOVER

If any of the themes that Sam highlighted in his videos are prominent in your experience ...

- Solitude, Identity, Imagination – and any other ideas that speak to you
- The senses i.e. sight, sound, taste, touch, smell, as well as your feelings
- What else emerges in your dark space?

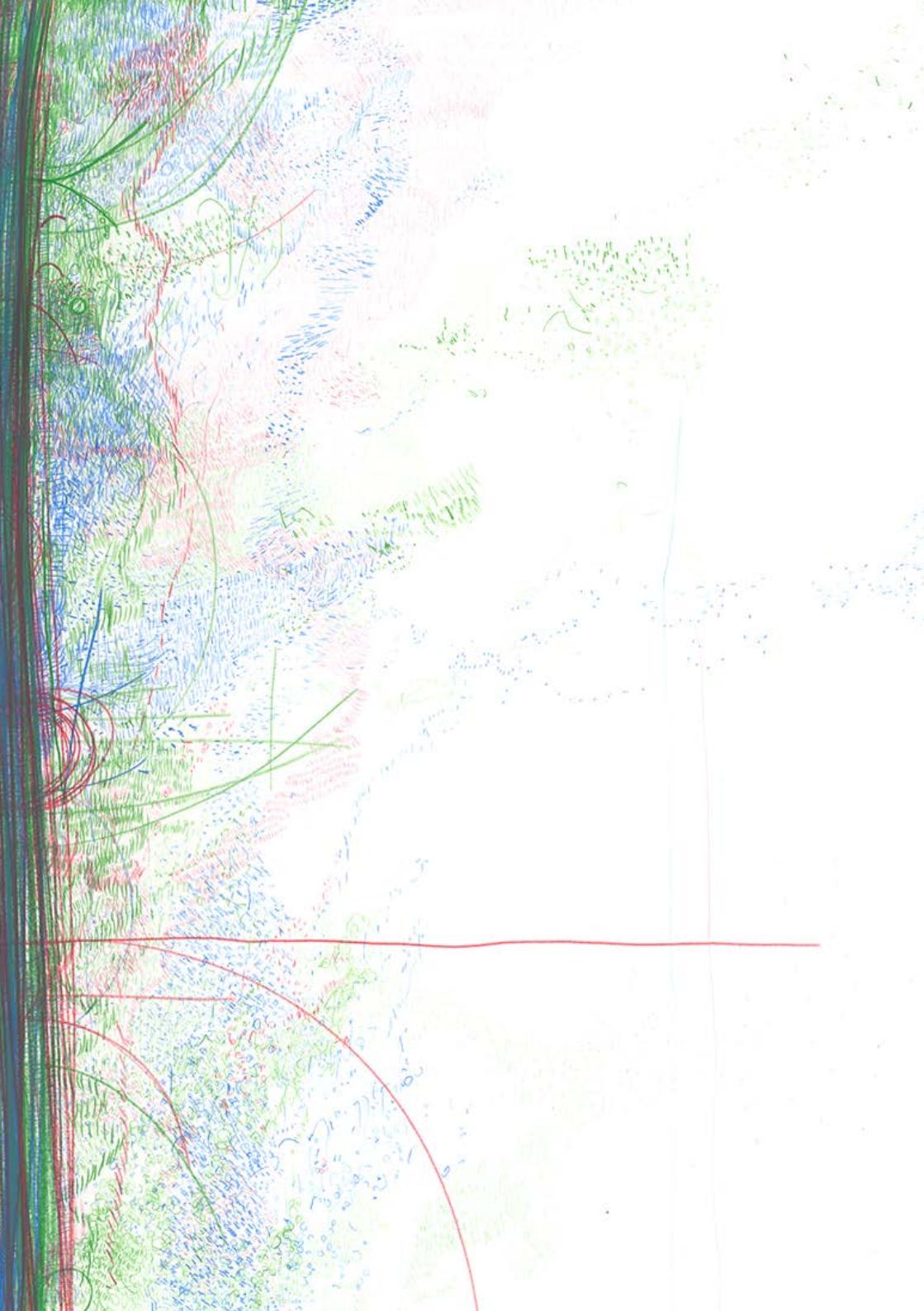
## REFLECT

When you have completed the Darkness Exercise, create your own ‘Thinking Space’ using post-it notes, a blank wall, a sheet of paper or a Mind-Map.

Note down the thoughts and/or images that come to mind immediately after your experience, allowing them to be as random or as organised as they appear.

While doing this, consider the process of trying to put these thoughts and emotions into language. What challenges and difficulties does this present and why?

AFTER  
THE  
DARK



“What we contribute, I believe,  
to the universe is meaning, which  
is something that the universe  
doesn’t intrinsically possess ...  
Poetry is, for me, the use of  
language to that end. It’s how  
you make meaning out of  
the meaningless”

*Don Paterson*

## IMAGINE

Both the individuality and universality of your experience. How might others have experienced the same project similarly or differently to you?

Before she went into darkness, author Bernardine Evaristo said:

"I'm looking forward to the stillness and the quiet ... just not being distracted, not having a relationship with my phone, and just shutting off from all external stimuli ... I'm like, what is going to be revealed through this process, as a writer?"

Which aspects of this quote resonate with you? What has been 'revealed' to you throughout this process?

## CREATE

Following in the footsteps of the four writers included in the project (Bernardine Evaristo, Don Paterson, Raymond Antrobus and Max Porter), write your own poem about your experience of darkness.

If you are happy to, share your poem with a family member or friend and discuss the ideas, feelings, and sensations you have explored in your poem. How does your poem connect to the ideas behind *A Delicate Sight*?

## DISCOVER

Your notes from your drawing activity – but not the drawing itself. Without looking at your original drawing, use your notes to re-draw your sketch. When you have finished, compare your sighted and unsighted drawings. How have darkness and light had an impact upon your creative process? Is there anything surprising about your sketches?

For examples see the picture (bottom) on page 28 or go to [adelicatesight.com](http://adelicatesight.com) to see Sam's artwork.

## REFLECT

To what extent did your 'Before the Dark' exercises prepare you for the darkness?

What have you learnt about yourself and:

- awareness or self-awareness?
- sensory overload?
- creative and imaginative processes?
- your relationship with space, light, and darkness?
- a delicate sight?

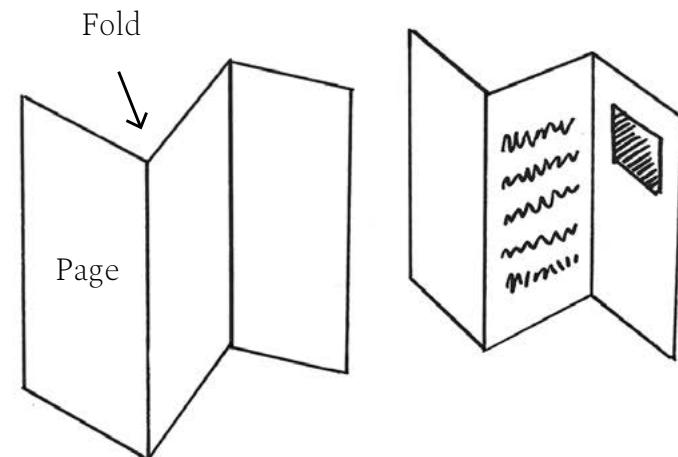
# ACTIVITY SHEETS

# CONCERTINA FOLD

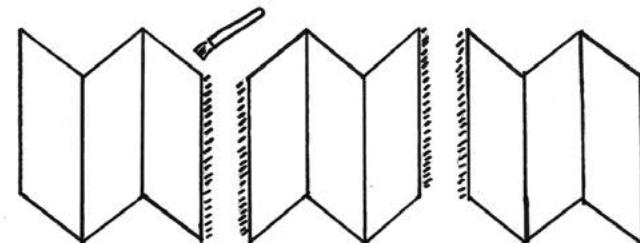
Fold as many ‘Concertina Folds’ as you need. On each page, summarise something that you have learnt and the significance of your Darkness Project to you. Your reflection on each page could be in-depth or just individual words with accompanying sketches; use whatever method best expresses the journey you have been on.

When you have completed as many concertina folds as you like, you can connect them using tape or glue to make your own art book.

Think of a title that sums up the work you have made.



Glue or Tape



Before the dark

In the dark

After the dark

We would love to see what you create...

You can email us feedback and your work at:  
creative@samwinston.com

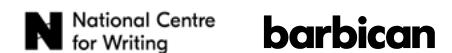
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