

## Top Writing Tips

### Marc Nair talks us through building a poem...

Writing a poem is just like constructing a house. First you lay the foundation, which is the theme of the poem. Could it, for example, be about love or hate, memory or death?

Foundations are also stress tested to see if they can handle a large amount of weight, so do you intend for your poem to be personal or universal, will it be understood hundreds of years later, or will everyone be lost and need a glossary to figure it out?

The form of the poem is like the structure of your house. Some people go for traditional designs like the sonnet, the *ghazal* or the ballad, while some are modernists and opt for an open form. Choose what best suits your poem; after all, you're going to live with your poem, not anybody else!

When it comes to putting in windows, think of them, for example, like the images in a poem. Some people like them functional while others may opt for fancy stained-glass skylights.

Houses go up in stages, so poems are often written in parts. Sometimes, poets may write everything in a burst of inspiration and declare their buildings complete, but that is rare indeed. Most of the time, a house demands attention to detail, to ensure that walls are put up with the correct alignment, tiles are laid without any gaps, pipes are fitted snugly. Similarly, poetry is about using the most precise words to express a poet's intention. Consider the opening three lines of the poem 'Tracks,' by the 2011 Nobel Prize Winner for Literature, Tomas Tranströmer:

2 a.m.: moonlight. The train has stopped

out in the middle of the plain. Far away, points of light in a town,

flickering coldly at the horizon.

Time, place and situation have all been succinctly established here, along with a strong sense of desolate loneliness.

And finally, when the house of your poem is complete, don't forget to live in it! Read it out, get opinions from friends and enjoy this new roof of words over your head.