WORD BRIDGES
INTRODUCTION

Word Bridges is an anthology of work by young refugee and migrant writers, created as part of the Royal Society of Literature’s 2019 RSL Literature Matters Awards, awarded to Rosemary Harris in partnership with English PEN and Salusbury World.

After featuring to acclaim in the 2018 Ten Pieces Prom at the Royal Albert Hall as Brave New Voices, the teenage writers from Capital City Academy showcased the work at an event at Free Word on June 24 2019.

Word Bridges was written and performed by Anwar, Dana, Faadimah, Ibtissam, Maryam, Mohamed, Nermen, Rawan, Rui, Sajeda, Sayeda, Sujoud and Tarek, and featured readings by Rosemary and Tanaka Mhishi.
We're a squad out of school and we're called Word Bridges. Our languages turn our ideas into riches.

We're called Word Bridges 'cause we fill up pages, And after that we conquer stages.

Words connect us when life divides us. Our voice subsides, but words revive us!

Words bridge time and words bridge space. Words make grace, which races to your face. Words make a base and fill up the place. So check out my race and look into my case.

Words join us to one another. We all connect like sisters and brothers.

I learn your story and you learn mine. Our words intertwine which makes us feel fine.

Words can help us understand. If you're unsure, I will give you a hand.

Words turn strangers into friends. Words help enlighten and make amends.

Words tell us when the poem ends.
YOUR LANGUAGE, MY LANGUAGE

English, before I knew it,
Sounded like a donkey speaking
Sounded superfast to understand
Sounded like a baby
Speaking gibberish
Sounded like someone running breathless
Like an overflowing river
Like bubbles in a shisha

English, before I knew it,
Sounded like war, like gunshots,
Like a night in Syria

English
Made me scared.

English, before I knew it,
Sounded like a dirty look
Sounded like barking dogs
Sounded confusing
Like watching TV without volume

English
Feels awkward

ANWAR, FAADIMA, MOHAMED, RAWAN, SUJOUD & TAREK
I like to speak Arabic
Because I like it!

Because it's made for me.
Because it suits me.

I like to speak Arabic
Because it feels to me
Like a family language.
Because people I talk to understand me.

Because it's a strong language.
Because it feels easy to speak fast.

TAREK
MERMAIDS

You were here.
All of a sudden you were
4000 miles away.

They say childhood friends
Remain by your side but
Days went by,
Then weeks

Then months and you were
Still missing.

2 months ago
You showed up!
Online.
The person I thought I’d lost for good

But you’re not the same.
You were a kid like me
Back then.

We’d jump around acting
Like clowns, pirates, mermaids.

Now you’ve changed.
I don’t like it.

7 years ago we were 7.
7 years later we’re 14.

But it’s like those 7 years
My life was fake and now
That you’re back I thought
Things would be the same.

I guess not.

All I see is your unrecognisable face
Digitised.

I’ve wasted years
Waiting for you
To come back.

FAADIMAH
HALF

She is my past and my future.
There isn’t any word to describe her.

Only one thing, she is my other half.

She is the one I would want
To see now.
We’ve been together about 13 years.
We’ve been separated for a year.

I met her when I was 2 years old.
We were in the same country
But different cities.

We were born in the same month
On the same day.

We have the same personality,
The same mind.

If we think about something
We would be thinking
The same thing.

SAJEDA
My language
Feels normal
Feels warm and cosy like my family

Like going to sleep, natural
Like staying at home
Watching TV with your family

My language
Feels like home
Feels like a sanctuary
Where you can seek comfort
With others who understand

Feels very fast.
Like a motorbike

Like there’s multiple versions
Of the same reality

Feels like rapping

Feels hot.
Like the beach

Feels like a comfortable pair of shoes.

RUI
Slowly, my eyes open,
Uncoating them from the familiar darkness.

The bright light is forcing me to keep my eyes closed.

I turn away from the glistening sun shining through my bedroom window. I'm trying to take cover from the torture of the light.

My eyes pass a photo from back then
When things seemed happy

When he was here.

Uncomfortable, I rub my eyes and pick up the photo.

I drift off to the magical place
I called my home.

IBTISSAM
I am 13 years old
I loved someone who is way older than me.
He was 15 years old.

His love makes my heart beat fast.
The feeling never stops.

His eyes were blue as the bright blue sea.
He had hair that was soft
Each time I feel it.

I feel there is something inside me
Burning.
We are like Romeo and Juliet.

RAWAN
My language
Is flexible

Is like a bull charging at you
Is harsh
Is fast as an airplane

My language
Is a relaxing summer day
In a field of fresh grass
Under a jasmine tree

Is wind blowing through the trees
Like it’s stealing my words

Is birds chirping on a tree
Is leaves snoring
Is gentle

My language
Is my body hair warming as I speak quickly

Is regaining my confidence
Is feeling safety

Is bringing back memories
Is the taste of home

ANWAR, MARYAM & MOHAMED
I feel like going on an adventure.

It would be like
An Indiana Jones film.
Like I’m in the Wild West
With one of my friends

Playing about.

I want to see how he’s doing
But I can only speak with him via the internet.

I want to go on an adventure with him
Just to see what he is up to

Nowadays.

RUI
I am 15 years old.
I have a cousin who is 28.

When I'm with him
I feel like he's my friend, someone my age.

He doesn't act like he's big and I'm small.
He makes me feel we're the same.

I still respect him
And don't go too far with him.

He doesn't care, he likes me.
He won't get upset.

I asked him one time,
'Why do you treat me like this?'

He said, 'Because I want to see
If I joke with you, would you get upset?'

I said, 'No.
You're older than me.
Respect means to respect adults:"

'Thank you' he said.
'That's what I like about you.
You're respectful.'

He makes me feel we're the same.
CONNECTED

Even though you are not here
Still we are connected.

Every time I remember you
I remember all the tough and fun times we had together.

I wish that stuff didn’t happen
And that you’re still in this world

But you’re always going to be in my mind and heart.

I hate the fact that you cannot see me
Or I see you
Because of the war that has separated us.

I want to say that I will never forget you
Or forget the memories.

My beloved ones.

SUJOUD
ALL THE SECRETS

She’s a good person.

We watched films and went to the park
In Turkey.
We spoke Arabic together.
We liked to be just me and her.

We told each other all the secrets.

She said she was going to Germany.
I felt sad.

When I’m big, I want to go to see her.
We will never forget each other.
It’s the same
When we talk on the phone.

We talk about how she is.
She tells me her secret.
I tell her my secret.

She is happy in Germany.
She has blonde hair and green eyes.

She’s from Syria.
Like me.

We like Turkish films.
She has one sister and four brothers.
They are in Germany.

Me and her, we love the same things.

DANA
BEST FRIENDS FOREVER

When you think you’ve found those who mean the world to you
Who will stick with you and fight the world for you
The people who you trust with your life.
The ones who you think will never deceive
And you love them to bits
The ones who are supposed to stick with you through thick and thin
Mould you into something better from within

But by the end everything you gave them ends up a waste
Because they were too selfish, too vain
Because the ones who you thought who would remain.
In reality turned out to be fake

And sometimes I think it was my fault, and I’m all alone
Because that empty void within me has left me seeing red on my own
And I’m scrolling through my feed on Instagram
And I envy the pics of you and your new mates
Because a rush of memory floods through my brain
Of all those good times engraved
But I can’t decipher whether everything that’s happened in these 3 years
Happened for the best
Because 30 second screenshots of life don’t expose the truth behind the camera
Maybe I’ve been lucky and secretly blessed

Because if I travel back through the years,
Each year has blossomed into opportunities that a whole life has never seen
It’s been a true learning curve with the people I’ve met

I’ve met amazing teachers who I’m absolutely terrified of disappointing
Something that no-one expects
So perhaps those vivid times were just to balance out
The blessings in disguise that were on the way
And I just wanted to say thank you to my true best friends
For every single amazing day

SAYEDA
My language
Sounds like birds chirping
Sounds like swans

Sounds like females having a fight

Sounds like high heels
Hitting the stairs

Sounds like a fire engine
Fast and harsh, like Saudi Arabia

My language
Sounds so serious

Sounds like when I talk
With my grandmother
Forgetting words I used to know

Like a musical instrument
Having a dilemma
It doesn’t know what notes to play

My language
Sounds like the beach washing away

Sounds like the trees when the air
Hits them over

Sounds like chopping fruit

My language makes me feel confident
Feels like sweet pie
Munching in my mouth

MARYAM & MOHAMED
I have come a long way from home
Left my people that I like
And was very close to

I am very sad and angry
That it wasn’t a choice for me
To leave or not

I had to

My dear cousin, I know that you miss me
And I miss you too

Life can be very harsh sometimes
And you just have to keep living for people
That love you

You are going to have a lot of people trying to stop you
From what you are doing
Or who you like

Just be passionate because one day
You are going to forget the pain

MOHAMED
Haven't seen you for 6 years now
I really "miss you" even though
I talk to you over the phone
I still "miss you" I can't
Hug you like I used to I can't
Smell you or the days that you used to
Put me to bed, that I miss
I can't forget those days
I know you cannot see me now
Growing up one more year
I will finish high school
I'm almost there
I remember what you told me
"Follow your dreams and don't stop
And don't let anyone
Stop you."
I still remember the days that
We all used to sit as a family.
I want everyone to know that
It's not easy for anyone to be
Away from their family or home
I miss home
I miss all my family back there
Dad, I want you to know
That I'll make you proud
I'll ensure
You are proud of me
I hope you get well soon
I hope I will see you soon
"Follow your dreams and don't stop."

MARYAM
FOREST BRIDGE

The bridge is in the forest, where there are lots of trees.
An 8 year old girl is lost there, being chased by an unknown, dark figure.
She doesn’t know she’s being chased, but still she’s scared.

She’s come into the woods to find animals, so she can feed on their blood.
She’s scared that people will find out who she is and be afraid of her.
She’s scared of being alone.
She is being chased by a good person.
But she doesn’t know.

She will get to get to the other side of the bridge.
She walks slowly until she reaches the centre of it and stops.

She looks behind to see if something is there.
She thinks a vampire hunter is coming after her.
When she turns back around someone is standing in front of her.
She is startled and falls into the river below.

She wants to survive until she can find her home.
A boy her age pulls her from the water.

He wants to help her.

DANA, IBTISSAM, RAWAN
VOLCANO BRIDGE

There's a bridge between Syria and England.
Under it there's a volcano.
The bridge is so high, there are clouds under it.

There's a knight from Syria crossing the bridge.
He's going to save his girlfriend, Yasmin.
She was kidnapped by Prince William.

She has a special ring with her.
Whoever has it controls the world.

The knight, Anton, rides a beautiful black horse called Wahasha.
The Arabic word meaning 'Beast'.
Anton and Wahasha are best friends.
They are always together.

Prince William had gone to Syria
To see what it was like.
He saw Yasmin and thought she was very beautiful.
He and his guards dragged her into his carriage.

No migrants can cross the bridge between Syria and England.
Anton fears that the ring and his girlfriend are lost.

He has promised Prince William he will give him Wahasha
In exchange for Yasmin.
The Prince doesn't know about the ring and its powers.
He doesn't know how much power he has stolen.
He only thinks of Yasmin.

Anton feels terrible.
He doesn't know what to do.
He doesn't know how he can bear to part with Wahasha.

Without a pass, Anton has to climb over the border
That divides the bridge in two.
Wahasha tries to climb too.

The clouds below mask the flames in the mouth of the volcano.

ANWAR, RUI, TAREK
BRIDGE TO ANOTHER WORLD

The man driving the car is a famous singer.  
His name is Khalid.  
He's from Syria.  
He loves to sing Arabic songs on TV.  
He's driving onto a bridge.

Halfway across the bridge is a parallel universe  
Where he can escape all the problems in his current universe.

He's scared.  
His mum killed his dad.  
He's been living with the trauma for years.  
His mum being arrested is what he's most afraid of.  
He's scared people will find out.  
Because he's famous.

He got a letter from himself in another world.  
If he doesn't go to the bridge, a big hole will tear open  
In the fabric of reality and his secret will be revealed.

Everyone will see his trauma.  
He will lose his mother.

He wants to keep his secret hidden and take over the universe.

FAADIMAH, NERMEN, SAYEEDA
ROPE BRIDGE

There was a rope bridge between two mountains.
It was more like two lines than a bridge you could stand on.

Three teenagers from Syria were crossing the bridge.
Two girls and a boy.

Someone told them there was a map on the other side.
The map would show them the way home.

Three witches told them.
They were frightened they wouldn’t find the map.
That they wouldn’t find their way home.

As they were crossing, one of the ropes broke.
The boy was nearly to the other side.
He fell but he held on with one hand.

The girls tried to pull him up but he was very heavy.
He pulled them down.

They let go of each other and all climbed up,
Onto the other side.

MARYAM, MOHAMED, SUJOUD
BASE CAMP

For Anwar, Dana, Faadimah, Ibtissam, Maryam, Mohamed, Nermen, Rawan, Rui, Sajeda, Sayeda, Sujoud and Tarek

You are a mountaineer.
Throughout the night, you climb
The airless heights of new language.

From your base camp bed,
Its pillow plumped with snow,
You lace up your exhausted boots,
Fold your inedible map,
And ascend into your mind,
Under a sky locked into silent cloud.

Difficult syllables wait to trip you.
Misunderstanding holds its breath.
Creaks its avalanche warning.
You cannot afford to risk
Mistakes in the darkness.

You carry no oxygen.
There is no respite.
You are ice and alone.

Your learning tongue tries to shape itself
Around the impossible stones
You find in your mouth.

You stare at the sky as a stranger.
You have followed the night into first light

Where the clouds unknit,
Where the waking sun
Exposes the sheer
Face of your future,
The peaks dwarfing the dawn.

You have risen to meet the mountain,
The horizon your deepest breath.

You plant your bright flag at the top of the world.
You will fly all the colours of your family.

You have sung yourself into the sky.
You will dream yourself into voice.

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