

Play on Words Festival 2026

For readers, writers and lovers of words



Talks + Workshops + Performance and more!

Thu 22 Oct - Wed 28 Oct 2026

playonwords.org.uk

Live Events and Performance

Autumn Tales

Thu 22 Oct | 2.30pm - 4pm | free
(donations welcome)

Lymington Library

Join Read Easy New Forest to enjoy a peaceful hour listening to autumn stories and poems, read aloud by a specially invited panel. Hot drinks provided.

A Haunted House Story

Thu 22 Oct | 7pm | free
Online

In this brand new short audio drama, Minstead Lodge becomes the backdrop for a haunted house story written by some of the people supported by Minstead Trust's New Forest Day Opportunities.

Sci Fi and Fantasy Quiz Night

Fri 23 Oct | 7pm - 9pm | £5
Vibrant Forest, Hardley

Prove you know your galactic empires from your noble houses and your dragons from your dark lords: new adventurers welcome. Hosted by the Imaginarium Bookshop.



The Nightjar Journey

Sat 24 Oct | 10.30am - 11am | free
Hythe Library

A magical suitcase story from African Activities for ages 5+ about home, belonging and the places we carry with us.

Local Writer Showcase

Sat 24 Oct | 7pm - 9.30pm | Pay What You Decide

St Barbe Museum & Art Gallery, Lymington

A friendly and informal event in St Barbe's café, with a chance to hear from writers from the New Forest and further afield, featuring Liz Amos.

Play on Words Open Mic Showcase

Mon 26 Oct | 7.30pm - 9.30pm | Pay What You Decide

Forest Arts Centre, New Milton

A showcase edition of our regular Play on Words open mic, featuring Elvis McGonagall and Stephen Boyce. Regular participants, new readers and those who'd just like to listen are all welcome.



Stephen Boyce

Find more information and booking details at www.playonwords.org.uk/whatson

Workshops and Walks



Feathers, Friends & Found Poems

Thu 22 Oct | 12.30pm - 1.15pm | free

Coda Music & Arts Trust, Walkford

Create colourful collage artwork alongside simple friendship-themed list poems inspired by birds, landscapes and connections from around the world. For home educating children aged 5+. Part of the Nightjar Project exhibition from African Activities.

Once Upon a New Forest

Thu 22 Oct | 1.30pm - 2.15pm | free

Coda Music and Arts Trust

Using collage, maps and creative writing, children will invent their own New Forest folk tale. For home educating children aged 8+. Part of the Nightjar Project exhibition from African Activities.

Coastal Gothic Walk

Thu 22 Oct | 4.30pm - 6.30pm | free

Lymington to Normandy Marsh

An atmospheric four-mile walk taking in the coastline of Lymington Town and Normandy Marsh at dusk, with gothic readings along the way.

Uncover // Unearth

Fri 23 Oct | 11.30am - 1.30pm | free

St Barbe Museum & Art Gallery, Lymington

Digging up historical objects (from the ground, from the archive) is an act of unearthing the past. In this workshop, writer Emma Jones uses the St Barbe Museum collection to think about different types of writing, shifting states and how looking slowly at something reveals more than is first apparent.

Stories in Wax & Colour: Batik Workshop

Fri 23 Oct | 10am - 1pm | £36

Forest Arts Centre, New Milton

This workshop will blend storytelling with batik textile art, showing participants how narrative can be expressed through symbols, wax lines, colour, and texture. Open to ages 16+

Poetry Exchange Tombola

Mon 26 Oct | drop in between 9.30am and 4.30pm | free

New Milton Library

Play Poetry Tombola with the Poetry Exchange! Spin the drum and pick out a number from 1 -200, and it will be exchanged for a poem for you, brought to the Poetry Exchange by a reader who has known it as a friend.

How to Read a Poem

Mon 26 Oct | 2pm - 4pm | Pay What You Decide

New Milton Library

Is poetry a bit lost on you or do you wonder if you're just not 'doing' it right? Come and see what we make of it together as a communal act in a relaxed setting, encouraging conversation, connections, questions and delight. With poet and writer Matt West.

Workshops and Walks



Isaiah Dreads

Writing from Nature

Tue 27 Oct | 10am - 12pm | Pay What You Decide

Hythe Library

A writing workshop which brings the outdoors in, finding inspiration from the outdoors and writing with natural materials, with writer and artist Yarrow Townsend, New Forest Writer in Residence in 2025.



Illustration by Jo Cockwell

Find Your Voice

Mon 26 & Tue 27 Oct 10am - 1pm |
Wed 28 Oct 2pm - 5pm | free

Coda Music & Arts Trust, Walkford

Join rapper, MC and experienced creative facilitator Isaiah Dreads for an intensive three-day creative programme exploring hip-hop, lyric writing, identity and belonging, as part of the Nightjar Project from African Activities. For ages 16 - 25.

Words to Pictures

Mon 26 Oct | 10am - 11.15am (5-7 year olds) and 11.30am - 12.45pm (8-12 year olds) | £8.50

Forest Arts Centre, New Milton

Children's book illustrator, Anita Bagdi, guides young artists in a fun way to unlock their imagination by illustrating a whole story in one image, and have a go at illustrating their very own book cover.

Words + Pictures = Ideas

Tue 27 Oct | 2pm - 4pm | Pay What You Decide

Hythe Library

A playful illustration and writing workshop for ages 8-12, exploring how looking, drawing, noticing and words can work together to spark ideas and creativity, with writer and illustrator Jo Cockwell.



Illustration by Anita Bagdi

Find more information and booking details at www.playonwords.org.uk/whatson

Writers Day

Facilitation for Writers

Sat 24 Oct | 10.30am - 12.30pm |

£16 / Pay What You Decide

St Barbe Museum & Art Gallery, Lymington

Do you have skills and experience as a writer that you want to share and don't know where to start? Join ArtfulScribe's founder and artistic director for tips, ideas, and approaches towards facilitating creative writing groups and workshops to enrich and uplift everyday people in a variety of community sessions.

Finding Writing Communities

Sat 24 Oct | 1.30pm - 3pm |

£10 / Pay What You Decide

St Barbe Museum & Art Gallery, Lymington

Writing is often thought of as a solitary pursuit but finding and building communities can be core to sustaining your writing practice. With Adam Singfield of the New Forest Writers Group, now celebrating their 20th year, writer and community facilitator Adeola Sheehy, and children's book editor and author Alli Brydon, ArtfulScribe explores the ways in which writing is all about people.



Alli Brydon



Funding Routes

Sat 24 Oct | 3.30pm - 5pm |

£10 / Pay What You Decide

St Barbe Museum & Art Gallery, Lymington

Seeking funding for research and development time, your own writing, or a project which will benefit local communities through reading, writing and literature? Join ArtfulScribe and Laura Bullivant, Cultural Development Manager at Hampshire Cultural Trust, to discuss how to build a project, partnership funding and grants, including Arts Council applications and opportunities specifically for New Forest creatives.

Find more information and booking details at www.playonwords.org.uk/whatson

Also included

The Imaginarium

Mon - Sat 10am - 5pm,

Sun 11am - 4pm

10 Angel Courtyard, Lymington

Award winning, family run, independent bookshop in the heart of the New Forest.

Poetry Exhibition

Tue 20 Oct - Tue 3 Nov | free

Waiting Room, New Milton Station

Featuring winning poems from this year's community themed poetry competition run by the Friends of New Milton Station.

Who Tells Our Stories?

Fri 2 Oct to Fri 30 Oct,

Mon - Fri 10am - 4pm | free

Coda Music & Arts Trust, Walkford

A Nightjar Project exhibition from African Activities, bringing together Global Majority artists and creative voices exploring identity, belonging, heritage, place and who gets to tell the stories that shape us.



New Forest Writers Group

First Monday of the month |

10.30am - 12.30pm | free

Forest Arts Centre, New Milton

The New Forest Writers Group meets on the first Monday of every month at Forest Arts Centre. No need to book, all welcome.

Story Trails

free

various locations

Discover a variety of self-led family trails in Ringwood, Hythe, New Milton and more, developed with local children by Culture in Common and New Forest District Council.



At a glance event programme

■ Who Tells Our Stories?	Fri 2 - Fri 30 Oct	drop in
■ Poetry Exhibition	Tue 20 Oct - Tue 3 Nov	drop in
■ Feathers, Friends & Found Poems	Thu 22 Oct	12.30pm - 1.15pm
■ Once Upon a New Forest	Thu 22 Oct	1.30pm - 2.15pm
■ Autumn Tales	Thu 22 Oct	2.30pm - 4pm
■ Coastal Gothic Walk	Thu 22 Oct	4.30pm - 6.30pm
■ A Haunted House Story	Thu 22 Oct	7pm
■ Stories in Wax & Colour: Batik Workshop	Fri 23 Oct	10am - 1pm
■ Uncover // Uneath	Fri 23 Oct	11.30am - 1.30pm
■ Sci Fi and Fantasy Quiz Night	Fri 23 Oct	7pm - 9pm
■ The Nightjar Journey	Sat 24 Oct	10.30am - 11am
■ Facilitation for Writers	Sat 24 Oct	10.30am - 12.30pm
■ Finding Writing Communities	Sat 24 Oct	1.30pm - 3pm
■ Funding Routes	Sat 24 Oct	3.30pm - 5pm
■ Local Writer Showcase	Sat 24 Oct	7pm - 9.30pm
■ Poetry Exchange Tombola	Mon 26 Oct	drop in
■ Words to Pictures (5-7s)	Mon 26 Oct	10am - 11.15am
■ Words to Pictures (8-12s)	Mon 26 Oct	11.30am - 12.45pm
■ Find Your Voice	Mon 26 & Tue 27 Oct	10am - 1pm
	Wed 28 Oct	2pm - 5pm
■ How to Read a Poem	Mon 26 Oct	2pm - 4pm
■ Play on Words Open Mic Showcase	Mon 26 Oct	7.30pm - 9.30pm
■ Writing from Nature	Tue 27 Oct	10am - 12pm
■ Words + Pictures = Ideas	Tue 27 Oct	2pm - 4pm
■ New Forest Writers Group	First Monday of the month	10.30am - 12.30pm
■ Story Trails	year round	self led

KEY

- Live Events and Performance
- Workshops and Walks
- Writers Days
- Also Included



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Support the future of Play on Words

Play on Words Ideas Café

In recent years, Play on Words has attracted over 2,000 people annually to more than 40 events, activities and exhibitions across the New Forest. Now, with your help, it's time to look to the future.

You are warmly invited to an informal and friendly afternoon of discussion and ideas, accompanied by refreshments and cake.

Whether you're a writer or a reader, a festival regular or a first-timer, come and share your ideas for what's next for Play on Words at our Ideas Café on the 21 November, 2 - 5pm, Lyndhurst Community Centre.

Find out how to sign up at www.playonwords.org.uk/getinvolved



Your support for Play on Words is valued, whether that's coming along to events, volunteering, telling others about the festival, or contributing in other ways. If you are able to donate, please scan the QR code. Donations will be received by ArtfulScribe C.I.C. for the delivery of the festival this year and in 2027.

This year's Play on Words is funded by Culture in Common, New Milton Residents Association, New Milton Town Council, and using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England as part of ArtfulScribe's literature development programme for the New Forest. The festival is led by a steering group made up of local residents and organisations including Culture in Common, New Milton Youth Trust, Read Easy New Forest, and St Barbe Museum and Art Gallery, coordinated by the Solent's literature development agency ArtfulScribe. Other partners and supporters of Play on Words include African Activities, Coda Music and Arts Trust, Forest Arts Centre New Milton, the Friends of New Milton Station, Hampshire Cultural Trust, Hampshire Libraries, the Imaginarium, Minstead Trust, New Forest District Council, New Forest National Park and Vibrant Forest Brewery.

