

**Manchester
City of Literature**

manchestercityofliterature.com

International
**MOTHER
LANGUAGE**
Day 2026



#MCRIMLD26

Welcome to International Mother Language Day 2026!

Manchester is a city full of languages – we have the densest multilingual population for a city of our size in the UK. Every year on 21st February, the city of Manchester recognises and celebrates all these languages for UNESCO’s International Mother Language Day.

For 2026 Manchester is thrilled to be hosting Voiced: The Festival of Endangered Languages for the first time, too, a celebration of language as a way to honour traditional knowledge and cultures that may be less well recognised, even in a city as diverse as ours.

With thanks to the international UNESCO Cities of Literature network for their participation in our celebrations. As a UNESCO City of Literature we are able to bring hundreds of languages to the fore of our celebrations from around the world and share a vital part of Manchester in return.



**Councillor
Garry Bridges,**
Deputy Leader,
Manchester
City Council

List of featured languages:

**Arabic
Belarusian
British Sign Language
Chinese
Cantonese
French
Frisian
Gaelic
Hungarian
Kaili
Kattunayakan
Konkani
Ladino
Low German
Lushootseed
Makassarese
Mixtec
Persian
Polari
Polish
Scots
Spanish
Ukrainian
Urdu
Welsh
Wendat
Yiddish
Zapotec**

VOICED: The Festival of Endangered Languages

Hear new voices at this festival celebrating writers and artists making work in endangered languages and dialects. This festival is scheduled as part of Manchester's International Mother Language Day celebrations.

Through poetry, performance, talks, live events and visual art, the festival brings together a remarkable line-up of artists whose work marks the vast impact art has on language and language has on art. This is the first UK creative festival to celebrate the linguistic vitality of countries around the world, as well as the endangered languages and dialects that continue to thrive within the UK.

Co-curated by Sam Winston, an artist whose interdisciplinary practice explores language not only as a carrier of messages but also as a visual form in and of itself, and Chris McCabe, a poet, novelist, artist and Head of the National Poetry Library, the festival promises to introduce audiences to new ways of thinking about and engaging with language.



VOICED Festival

Voiced Festival: Opening event

Manchester Poetry Library
Friday 20th February 2026
7 – 8:15pm
Free

Voiced, the UK's first creative festival for endangered languages, comes to Manchester. Join us for the opening event to discover writers and poets working to keep their languages alive through their work. Hear from Rachel Lichtenstein, who has been learning her heritage language of Yiddish to inform the book she is writing, a journey she will share at this event. And if you have never been in the presence of an Archdruid, now is your moment as Mererid Hopwood performs her work and talks of her role in activating the Welsh language through poetry. All performers will take part in a Q and A exploring questions at the heart of the Voiced festival: how can creativity help keep a language alive? What is the role of the young in language activation? And how might we think of the relationship between language and landscape?

This event will have British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation available



Voiced Festival Workshop: Writing and Mosaics Workshop with Lydia Hounat

Manchester Poetry Library
Saturday 21st February 2026
11am – 1pm
Free

Come along to this unique workshop combining visual art and writing based on the theme of spoken language and dialect. Led by writer and photographer Lydia Hounat, you will create a brand new work of art using fragments of tiles, ceramics and mirrors. Your own writing will be central to this new ceramic self-portrait which you will take with you at the end of the workshop. In addition, you will contribute to a collective work with the group focused on bringing marginalised voices into the foreground. This workshop will provide you with new techniques for how to use your voice and dialect as part of a bold and dynamic creative practice.

Voiced Festival: Multilingual Open Mic

Manchester Poetry Library
Saturday 21st February 2026
2 – 4pm
Free

Manchester Poetry Library are delighted to be hosting their fourth multilingual open mic night to celebrate International Mother Language Day 2026. We welcome readings in any language. You can choose to read your own poems or a poem by a well-known poet (or not so well-known). If you're still unsure, please just turn up and you can decide whether you want to read on the day. You might want to choose something spontaneously from our collection or just stay and listen.

This year we will also be joined by special guests to celebrate our collaboration with Voiced: The Festival for Endangered Languages, Afrocats and Manchester City of Literature. Places to read will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. Refreshments will be provided.



Voiced Festival: Polari and Poetry in Manchester

Manchester Central Library
Wednesday 25th February 2026
6:15 – 7:30pm
£8 (£4 unwaged)

Voiced Festival presents an unmissable evening of Queer poetry and performance. Presenting Polari, a hidden language of Queer experience, which will come to life in performance with Jez Dolan. Rosie Garland performs poems from Polari Prize-shortlisted *What Girls do in the Dark* and her recently published *This Is How I Fight*, an Observer Poetry Book of the Month. And poet afshan d'souza-lodhi explores Queer language through her mother tongue Konkani, a minority and national language in India. Join us for this electric evening exploring the intersections of Queer languages, poetry and performance.

VOICED Festival

Voiced: Seed Syllable Exhibit

The Holden Gallery,
Manchester School of Art

Friday 20th February 2026
10am – 8:30pm

Saturday 21st February 2026
11am – 5pm

Free

Discover how leading poets, artists and writers express what matters most through endangered texts, new poems and striking visual art in this 3 day exhibit at the Holden Gallery.

This free exhibition and events features a visual showcase of five new poems, a major new artwork commission – Seed Syllable – by visual artist Sam Winston. Come and join a host of poets, artists and creators in celebrating our linguistic freedom. There are over 7000 languages worldwide that can be written in over 300 different alphabets and scripts, yet that number is shrinking dramatically. Drop in on Manchester School of Art, Cavendish Street to explore why that is and discover a diverse cast of creatives that are bringing endangered languages and stories to life.



Image Credit: Sam Winston



Image Credit: Sam Winston

No Tongues Left To Chant

No Tongues Left To Chant

A digital exhibition of poetry and works of literature in languages on the UNESCO vulnerable and endangered list.

Manchester City of Literature are working with the team behind Voiced: The Festival of Endangered Languages to bring a celebration of endangered languages to Manchester in February 2026. As part of this Cities of Literature around the world have contributed poems and translations to an online exhibition.

As part of our ongoing work celebrating International Mother Language Day in Manchester, you can now scroll through contributions to see writing, poems and translations in 16 vulnerable languages including Lushootseed and Wendat where there are no longer any first-language speakers remaining.

These pieces are shared with huge thanks to the authors, translators and archives to draw attention to how precious languages are to strengthen culture and the protection they need to continue.



Image Credit: Sam Winston



Image Credit: Sam Winston

Events

Nothing Remained Unchanged but the Clouds: Artist Talk & Book Launch

Manchester Central Library
Thursday 5th February 2026
6 – 8pm
Free

A postcard collection sparks a remarkable artist's engagement with a small French town, revealing shared histories and contemporary voices.

Nothing Remained Unchanged but the Clouds by Alan J. Ward is an artist-book in the fullest sense: a work conceived, shaped, and authored through artistic practice. Developed through sustained collaboration with the community of Grandpré in the French Ardennes, the book traces stories held within German WWI postcards and transforms them into a living archive of memory, material culture, and shared authorship.

The launch will take the form of an illustrated conversation moderated by an arts commissioner familiar with Ward's practice. Ward will be joined by a small panel of academic, artistic, and language collaborators, alongside voices from Grandpré. Together, the discussion will weave local histories with contemporary perspectives, while reanimating the enduring connection between Manchester and Charleville-Mézières, the departmental capital.

With the support of Alliance Française Manchester, a special display of selected artefacts from Archives+ and the North West Film Archive has been assembled specifically for the evening. These materials document the shared histories between Manchester and the Ardennes, and sit alongside the themes explored in the book.



Fuse Manchester's Community & Care Poetry Night

Stage & Radio
Thursday 19th February 2026
6 – 9pm
16+
Free

Fuse's open mic/poetry night returns once again - celebrating community, care and culture at Stage & Radio. Positioned around International Mother Language Day, we will be featuring two incredible headliners and six other talented performers to share original works.

Whether you're new to poetry nights, or a regular presence across open mics in Manchester, we hope for this event to be an evening of solidarity and inspiration. Everyone is welcome to Fuse's events, but we actively encourage Black, Asian, and Global Majority creatives to join us and be a part of Fuse's diverse community.



“Many Languages, One Community” [多語・同心] – Family Art Workshop

Wigan Library
Saturday 21st February 2026
09:30 – 10:15am and 10:30 – 11:15am
Free

Join Wigan Library to celebrate International Mother Language Day through creativity, language, and family fun.

In this hands-on workshop, families will create a paper collage sculpture or framed paper collage using colourful papers, textures, and mixed materials. The activity highlights how we live together in a community rich in diverse cultures and languages.

The artist will introduce her mother language, Cantonese, by sharing Cantonese words through stencil-making. Families are welcome to include words from any language that is meaningful to them in their artwork.

This is a relaxed and welcoming session designed for families to enjoy together. No previous art experience is needed, and all materials are provided.

Events



Manchester Libraries Family Fun Days

Saturday 21st February 2026 Times:

Wythenshawe Forum Library:
2 – 4pm

North City Library: 11am – 1pm

Longsight Library: 12 – 2pm

Manchester Central Library:
1 – 4pm

Free

Celebrate the languages and cultures of Manchester's local communities. Enjoy live performances and try your hand at traditional crafts at one of the above listed Manchester Libraries on the 21st February. There's no need to book a ticket, just drop-in. Children and families are most welcome!





Linguistic Landscapes in Manchester and Beyond

Manchester Museum
Saturday 21st February 2026
11am – 12pm
Free

Join the Linguistic Diversity Collective for a talk by Dr Serge Sagna, Prof. Tine Breban and Dr Simone de Cia to mark International Mother Language Day 2026.

This talk centres around the multilingual public signs found across towns and cities, and what they tell us about language domination and language policy in Manchester and beyond.

Alongside Manchester, examples will come from Ireland, Belgium, Canada, Senegal and more.

This talk is presented in partnership with Creative Manchester and Manchester Museum.

Events

IMLD Storytime: Mi primer Platero

Manchester Central Library
Saturday 21st February 2026
12 – 12:45pm
Free
Recommended Age: 6+

Celebrate International Mother Language Day 2026 with us!

The Instituto Cervantes in Manchester, in collaboration with Manchester Central Library, invites you to a unique experience for children - reading the story My First Platero.

Can a little donkey be a poet's inseparable friend? Discover this touching tale inspired by the work of Juan Ramón Jiménez. Platero was not like other donkeys: small, grey and soft, with eyes that shone like black crystals. Together with his friend Juan Ramón, he wanders through the countryside, plays with children, and helps those in need.



Looking for Languages – Family friendly trail at Manchester Museum

Manchester Museum
Saturday 21st February 2026
1pm – 4pm
Free

The Linguistic Diversity Collective invites you to join us for some half-term fun to celebrate

International Mother Language Day at Manchester Museum. Grab your activity sheet and follow the language-themed trail around the museum's enchanting collections, thinking about your own language(s) along the way.

Places are free to reserve, with several arrival time-slots to choose from. Simply book one place per family. This free, family-friendly activity is proudly presented in partnership with Creative Manchester and Manchester Museum.

Bridge of Sunflowers Exhibition

Manchester Central Library
Monday 26th January –
Friday 27th February 2026
9am – 8pm
Free

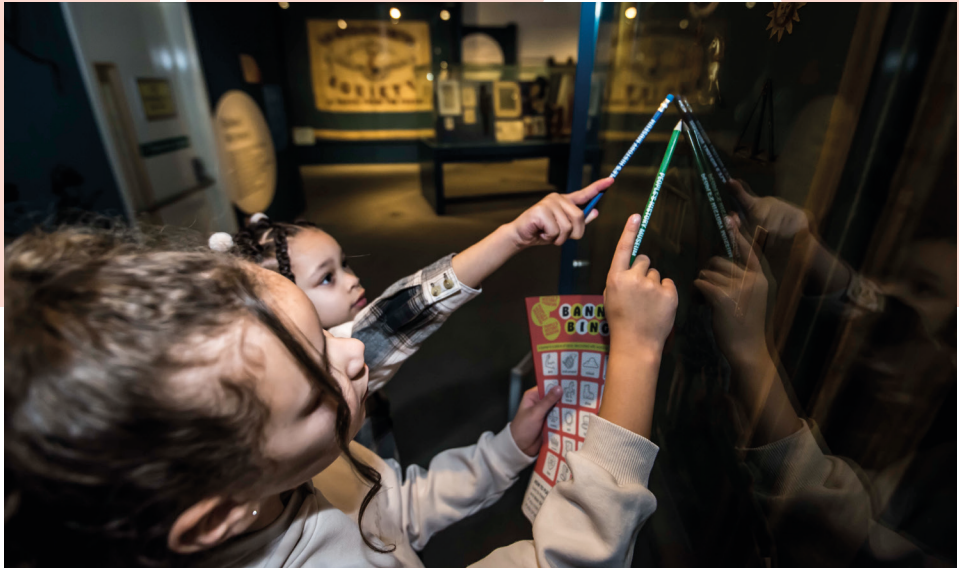
Bridge of Sunflowers is composed of artwork by young Ukrainian artists from the city of Lviv. This unique collection explores the impacts of the ongoing conflict, as well as the hopes and dreams of those living through it.

Participants were supported by the Sunflower Dreams Project, which showcases the work of Ukrainian children in exhibitions across the European Union, the United Kingdom and North America. The project was created and is supported exclusively by a team of multinational volunteers.

Creative responses from young people in Manchester can be viewed alongside the artwork. These are the outcome of workshops run by creative arts charity Never Such Innocence (NSI), who give children and young people a voice on conflict. The workshops were led by expert practitioners – author Nik Perring and artist Alex Hinge. All of the work on display is responding to NSI's international competition theme for 2025/26 – 'In Someone Else's Shoes'.



Events



Banner Bingo

People's History Museum
Saturday 21st February 2026
10am – 5pm drop-in
Free

People's History Museum (PHM) is giving a full house to International Mother Language Day 2026 with the news that it will be publishing its popular Banner Bingo experience in eight different languages.

From Saturday 21st February, alongside English, visitors will be able to take their pick between Arabic, Chinese, French, Persian, Polish, Spanish, and Urdu as they take part in the free Family Friendly activity at the museum.

Banner Bingo is a quest to find a series of images featured within the colourful banners that are on display throughout the galleries of the museum. A cat, a cloud and a crown are just some of the icons that eagle-eyed visitors will need to spot. You can pick up a Banner Bingo card from the welcome desk at PHM, and after completing your search there is a small prize for taking part. Two versions are available to suit both younger and older players.

This celebration of language as part of a shared experience is the perfect way to explore the national museum of democracy.

The Disfluencies CoLab: Embodying Mother Languages through Poetry & Drawing

University of Manchester
Student Union Building Room 2.2
Saturday 21st February 2026
2:30 – 4pm

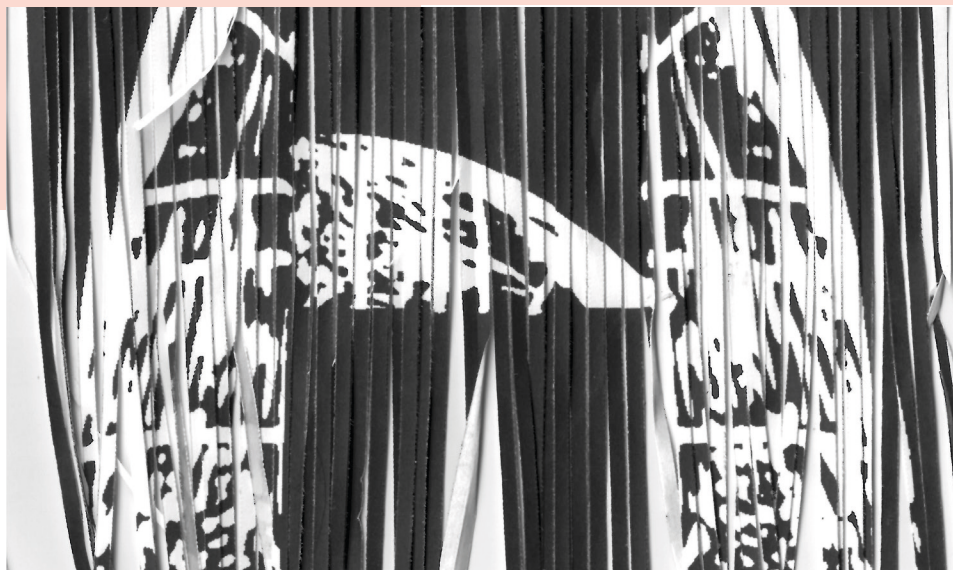
Altogether Otherwise
Saturday March 7 2026
2:30 – 4pm

Free

A chance to explore what a mother language means to participants beyond spoken fluency. We will explore how we can feel nurtured and nourished by expressing a mother language visually through signs and embodiment. The workshop will

consider translation, sign languages, drawings and mark making and how all these elements of communication offer a space where we can re-imagine what a mother language might offer. This is an interactive event using poetry and drawing to unlock identity and cultural connections through a polyvocal and polyvisual approach.

Participants are invited to explore ways of layering text with practices of image-making through creating a few lines of poetry on the spot. This workshop is for anyone interested in creative writing, poetry, language, performance, translation, and cultural exchange. No previous experience necessary. All are welcome and we will share in a non-judgmental and relaxed space to support creative responses.



Events

Words Left Behind

The Portico Library
Saturday 21st February 2026
4:30 – 6pm
Free

Join us as we reflect on the words that defy translation. In this roundtable, a panel of translators working with refugee charities, newly arrived students and community organisations in Manchester will respond to words suggested by visitors to The Portico Library, exploring words with no English equivalent, cultural ideas that are hard to explain, and moments when language can either help people settle or make things harder. An invitation to recognise the often unseen work translators do to support understanding and inclusion. Everyone is welcome.



MACFEST: Forgotten Foods: Memories and Recipes from Muslim South Asia

Sunday 22nd February 2026
2 – 3:30pm
Free

Join Professor Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, historian and author, for a captivating conversation, as she discusses her acclaimed book, “Forgotten Foods: Memories and Recipes from Muslim South Asia” with Shamim Choudhury, award-winning Media correspondent and writer.

Heritage food is a booming industry in India and Pakistan today. Five-star hotels and fashionable restaurants tout traditional menus, while food festivals bring historic flavours to a general public hungry for dishes with provenance.

Vloggers and bloggers from Instagram to TikTok have jumped on the bandwagon, enriching their #foodporn with a spoonful of Wikihistory. Yet, from the perspective of professional historians, all this chatter about ‘lost recipes’ and ‘gastronomic traditions’ needs more bonafide research to give it historical meaning and texture.

This realisation led to the birth of a project called Forgotten Food to open communications between scholars and food practitioners,

Online

including writers, performers, farmers and chefs. Among the many collaborations to come out of this project is a delectable collection of food stories, histories and recipes called Forgotten Foods: Memories and Recipes from Muslim South Asia (2023). As well as celebrating an amazing diversity of cuisines, it also points to how Muslim kitchens have so profoundly shaped and enriched South Asian food today.

This event pairs food historian Professor Siobhan Lambert-Hurley with chef and writer Sadaf Hussain to discuss their contributions and collaborations to recover lost histories and fading culinary traditions.



MACFEST: The Global Literary and Poetic Journey: Young Voices

Online

Wednesday 25th February 2026
6 – 7pm
Free

Join MACFEST for an exciting International Mother Language Day event with young people from the UK and around the world, on a literary and poetic journey.

They will encourage cross-cultural dialogue, and highlight the power of words to connect people across borders. This event aims to create a vibrant space for cultural exchange, creativity, and the sharing of unique perspectives through the written and spoken word.

Participating schools include: Whalley Range High School, Newman College, Loretto College, Manchester Academy and Stretford Grammar School.

Hosted by: Lulieta Halimi, TV Host, Islam Channel.



The Stepmother

Manchester Poetry Library
Tuesday 10th March 2026
6:30 – 7:30pm
Free

In the aftermath of a crisis within her blended family, a stepmother weighs up her choices, past, present, and future. Fragment by fragment, she pieces together her story, with the honesty of a woman with everything to lose and everything to gain. Using words as a mirror, she tries to see herself as she is, not in the eyes of the society around her, but in the eyes of those who love her and who she loves.

La belle-mère / The Stepmother offers a complete re-reading of the stepmother archetype, a subject of the collective Western imagination for centuries. The challenges, duties, responsibilities, stakes, and

Events

freedoms of the role are weighed and analyzed without complacency, in this dynamic suite of narrative poems. The show can be performed in French or English by the co-authors themselves, Amélie Prévost and Rachel McCrum.

Delivered in partnership with Quebec City of Literature with thanks to Canada Council for the Arts and the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec for financial support in the form of two Research & Creation grants.



MACFEST: Respect My Language: Voices and Experiences

Online

Saturday 4th April 2026
2 – 3:30pm
Free

Join an insightful event in collaboration with Manchester City of Languages, where individuals from various backgrounds explore how language reflects our identities, cultures, and social class.

Bringing together people with lived experiences, our speakers will delve into how language both shapes and is shaped by systems of power, identity, and culture – and how respect, or the lack of it, plays a central role in these dynamics. They will also examine how dialects and ways of speaking are often tied to class and cultural belonging, and how language can serve as a tool of empowerment, control, or resistance. Join us as we challenge language hierarchies and celebrate the rich tapestry of voices that make up our communities.

Professor Yaron Matras will introduce the main language communities, with a focus on the language of the city's Muslim populations, and examine the power of dialect, the politics of “standard” language, and how linguistic diversity is often undervalued or stigmatized.



MACFEST: Manchester - One City, Many Voices

Manchester Central Library
Thursday 7th May 2026
6pm – 8pm
Free

Join the Manchester Lit&Phil and MACFEST for a vibrant evening celebrating the power of words to bridge cultures, spark understanding, and illuminate the rich tapestry of our city.

We bring together a distinguished panel of poets, whose award-winning works span continents, traditions, and lived experiences.

Through live readings and personal reflections our guest writers will explore what diversity and inclusion truly mean in a city shaped by

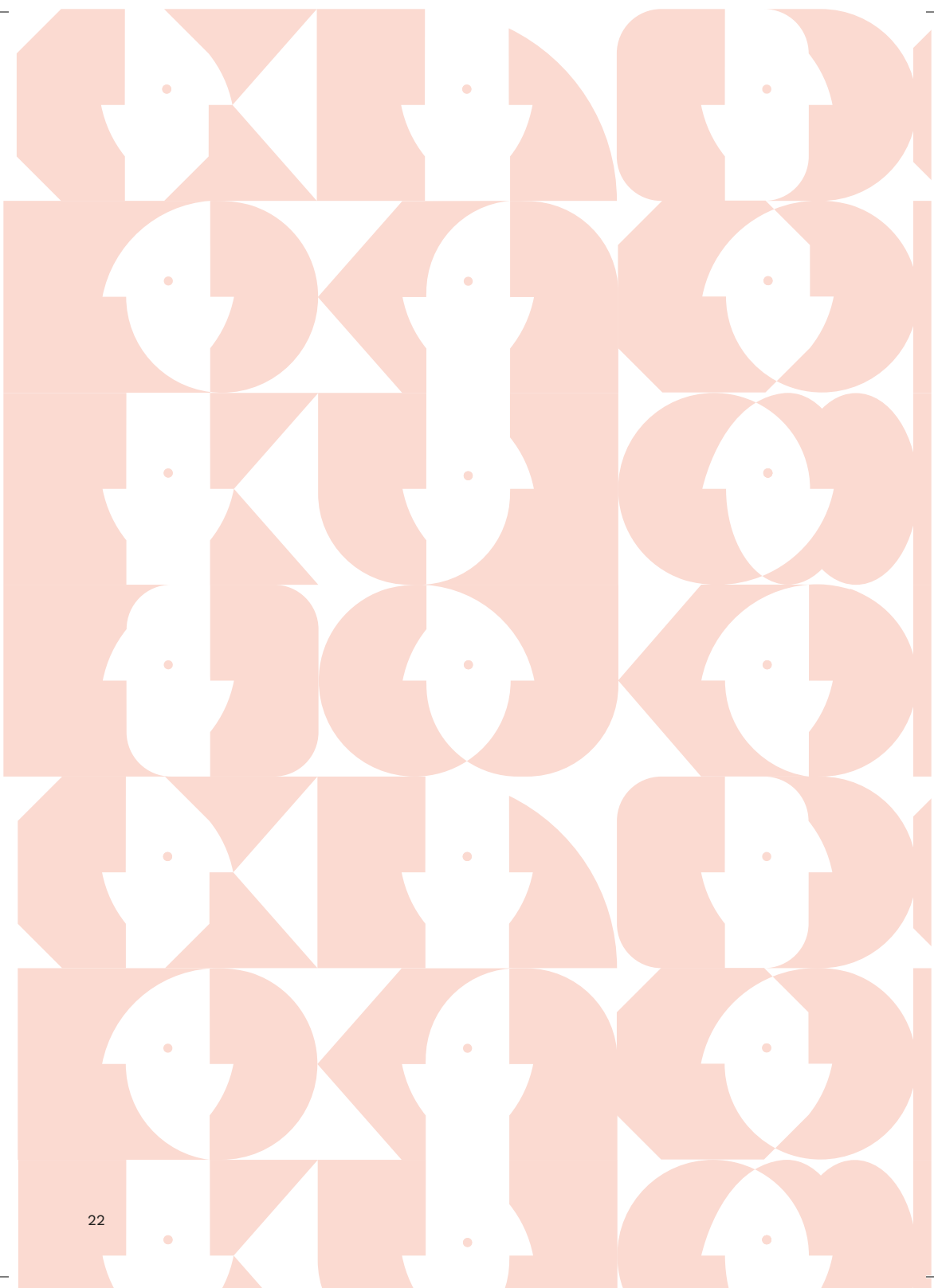
migration, creativity, and community. Their stories – rooted in memory, identity, struggle, joy, and hope – offer a compelling portrait of Manchester as a place where many cultures not only coexist, but flourish.

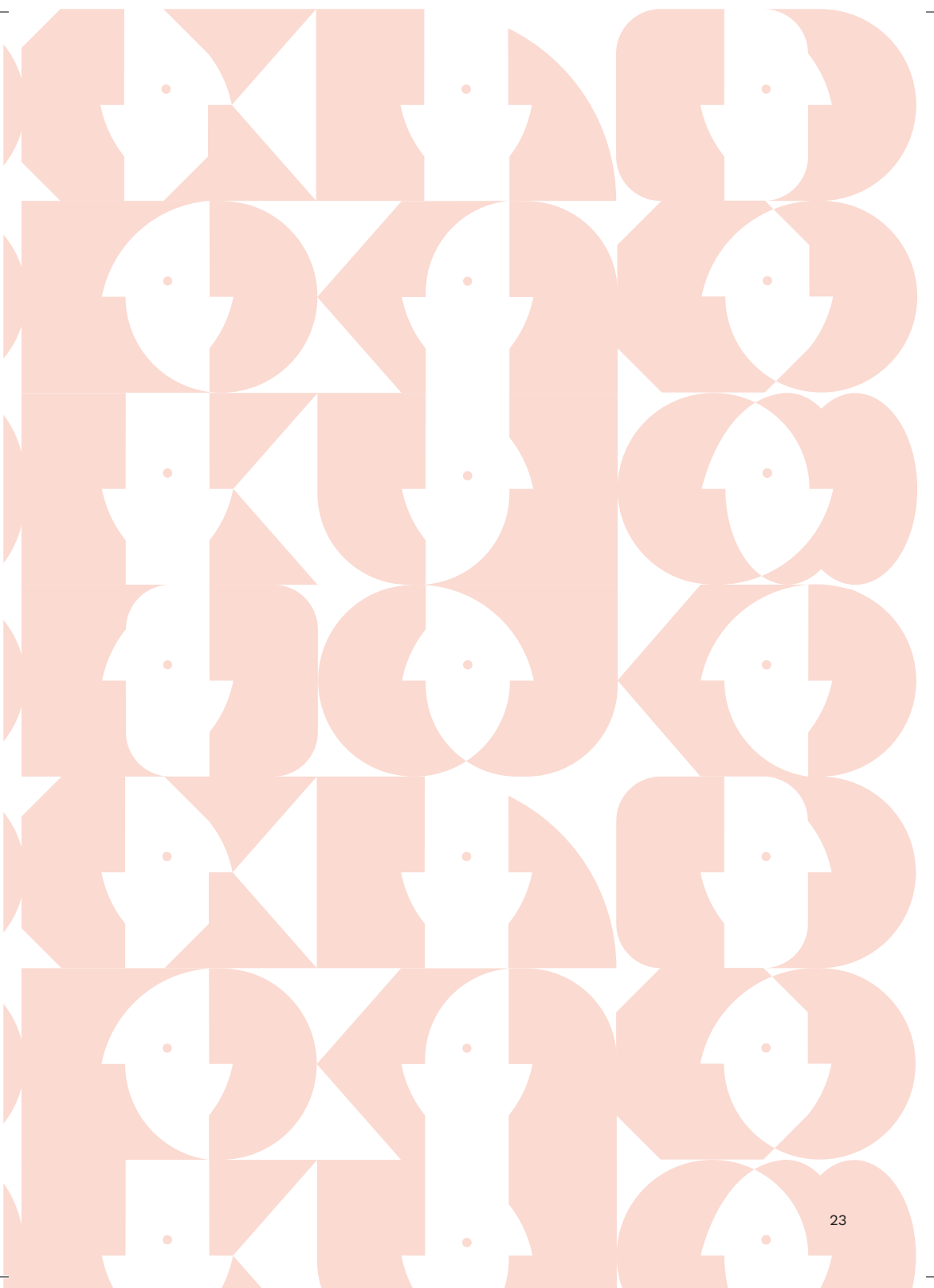
This unique event invites audiences to reflect on the ways literature can build empathy and connection, celebrating Manchester as an exemplar of multiculturalism at its best. Come prepared to be inspired, challenged, and uplifted by voices that reflect the city's past, present, and ever-evolving future.

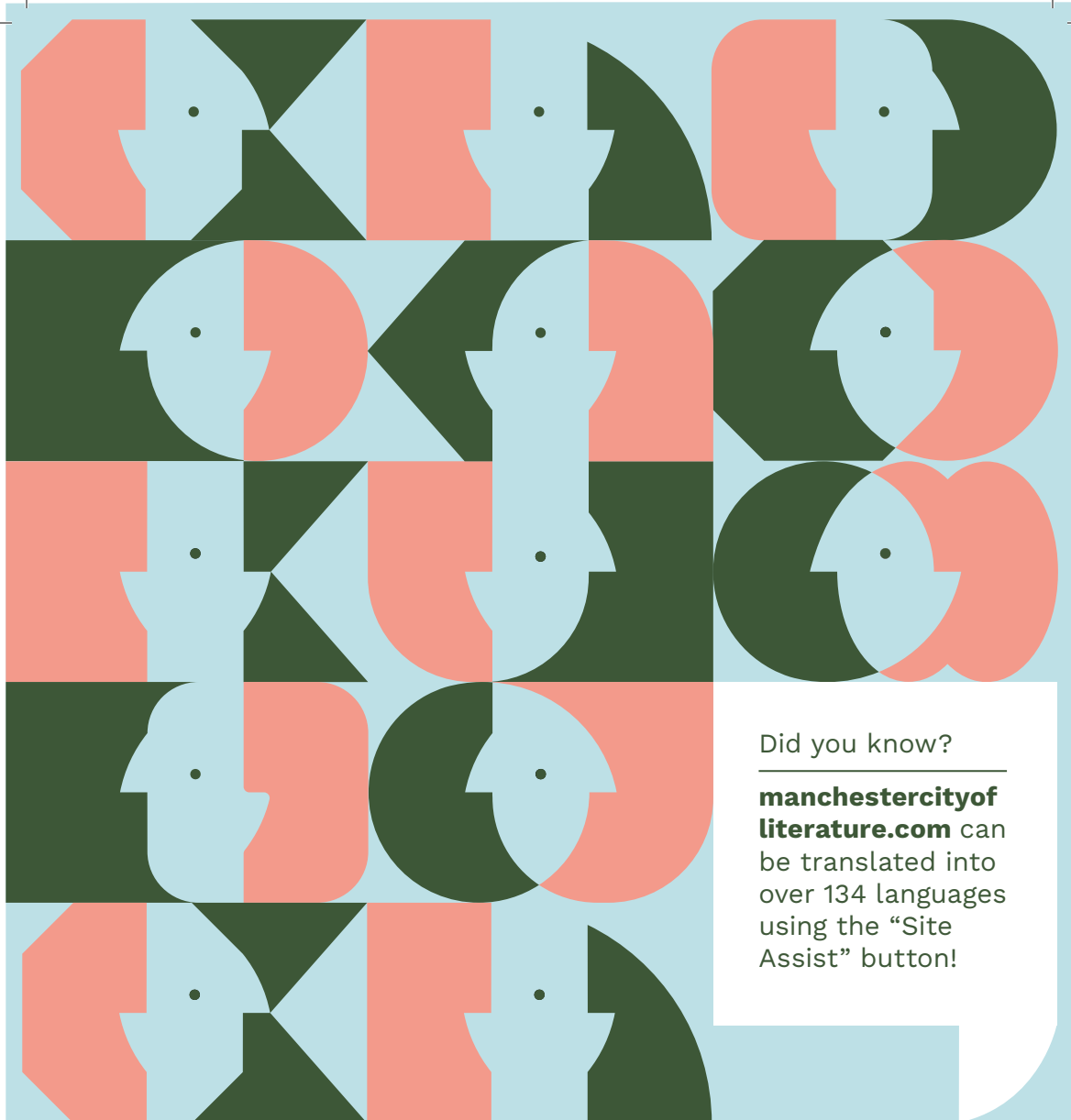
This is a free public event, designed to welcome audiences from all backgrounds and to highlight the unifying power of literature and the spoken word. There will be time for discussion and questions to the poets.



Image Credit: Ianthe Warlow







Did you know?

**manchestercityof
literature.com** can
be translated into
over 134 languages
using the “Site
Assist” button!

**MAN
CHE
STER**

A UNESCO City
of Literature



MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL



**Manchester
Metropolitan
University**

MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester

#MCRIMLD26

manchestercityofliterature.com