

## Ice-breaker Writing Activities

These short exercises may well lead to something productive that can be developed as a longer task.

### Bad Valentine

Students create a list of clichéd objects they would expect to find in a Valentine's card, e.g. roses, hearts, teddy bears, puppies. They then create a corresponding list of unusual and/or disgusting equivalents, e.g. nettles, intestines, pebbles, headless dolls, eels. Using their list, each student then writes the verse of a 'bad' Valentine card, e.g. 'My feelings for you are like the sting of a nettle / I love you with all the force of my intestines.'

### Coming Home

Think of ten things you experience with your five senses when coming home, e.g. 'a green front door', 'the feel of the cold brass hook where I leave my keys', or 'the smell of onions frying'. Now write a poem about 'Coming Home' that is in second person and lists all the things you see, hear, smell, touch and taste when coming home. 'You are the green front door, you are the cold brass of the hook where I leave my keys, you are the smell of onions frying.'

### Deleted Words

Give students a poem/short piece of writing and cross out most of the words, only keeping the interesting nouns, strong adjectives and verbs. Write what remains as a poem/short story.

### Family sayings

Ask students to share sayings that are common in their family. Think about idiosyncratic speech, dialects, and archaic and unusual phrases used by relatives, particularly old relatives. Use one of these as the start to a poem or story.

### Forbidden Letter

Give students any topic, but tell them they may not use a particular letter in their writing.

### I Am From...

Ask students to begin a sentence with these words, and encourage them to continue writing for at least ten minutes, jotting down whatever comes to mind (almost stream of consciousness). Encourage use of all senses.

### Imaginary Source

Introduce a number of idiomatic expressions or unusual words such as 'rule of thumb' or 'piece of cake'. You could use an online idiom list. Ask students to come up with reasons – as ridiculous as they like – why the phrases obtained their current meaning. They could then generate their own expressions and reasons behind them.

### Incongruous Description

Ask students to generate a list of abstract nouns (concept may need explaining) and a list of concrete places, e.g. love, hate and jealousy, and bathroom, hospital and bookshop. Now place two together to get incongruous pairings, e.g. 'the bathroom of jealousy', and ask them to write a piece about/containing the expression.

### Me(taphor)

Ask the students to create a piece where they compare every part of their body to something concrete, but instead of saying 'is like' they should just say it is that thing. They should start with their hair and work their way down to their toes, e.g. 'My hair is the sky, my nose is a mountain.'

### Short Autobiography

Ask students to write a brief autobiography (five to seven minutes). It should include seven facts, one of which is made up. Ask students to read the pieces aloud – the others should guess which is false.

### Thank you

Ask students to write a thank you to something we don't usually thank (e.g. a telephone, sheet, shower). Students should not name the object, so others can guess once each piece has been read out.

