NATIONAL WRITING DAY

27th June 2018

Writing Resources

for

Secondary Schools

Resources created in collaboration with

National Writing Day partners from across the UK

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

FIRST STORY

OLD POSSUM'S PRACTICAL TRUST

About National Writing Day

National Writing Day is a celebration of creative writing, and is co-ordinated by national literacy charity First Story and delivered in partnership with thirty-five other national partners.

Poems, stories, letters, raps, songs, scripts and more – we want schools, libraries, writing groups and communities across the country to share in this celebration through a series of events and activities.

We want people from across the UK to put pen to paper, unleash their imagination and make their voices heard. You're invited to join us at events across the UK; from Hull to Bristol, London to Edinburgh, Cardiff to Belfast, leading arts and culture venues will open their doors to the public with inspiring events and activities. If you can't find an event close to you, you can register your own event at your local school, community centre, workplace or living room.

We want everyone, everywhere to get writing in 2018 for the second National Writing Day. Join us at an event on Wednesday 27th June or share your stories online using #nationalwritingday.

Introduction

The blank page can be daunting. As both a part-time teacher of English and a First Story writer-in-residence, my working life is spent encouraging young people to put pen to paper and write. As a working author, my writing life is spent encouraging myself to put pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard, and write. As a teacher, workshop leader and author, I am all too aware of how daunting the blank page can be.

The problem with the blank page is that it can be filled with anything. It can be filled with everything. Being left to grapple with this infinity of possibility can paralyse a writer, stop them in their tracks, leave them struggling to put words down, or, even when words do appear, they are too often deleted, erased, crossed out almost as soon as they appear. The blank page is daunting because it gives you nothing but space to hold on to. There is no easy to read route across the blank page. That's what makes it a blank page. It hasn't been written yet.

I am a believer in the power of the writing prompt. Writing exercises, writing prompts, make the blank page manageable. They give the blank boundaries. They give the blank page focus. They help lay a path through the empty space of the page along which each individual writer can craft unique detours.

Each of the National Writing Day activities and exercises included here is a brick upon a pathway designed to help young writers navigate the blank page. A host of ice-breakers and starters support any session leader looking to engage and enthuse their students, with activities ranging from word association games, to mini-autobiography, and beyond, to writing bad poetry or metaphorical pen portraits. A series of writing models from a variety of styles, give students quality texts to respond to, with writing prompts and activities developed to help facilitate enthusiastic and original responses. There are guides for the use of non-verbal storytelling and group writing that will engage a broad range of ages and abilities, as well as guides for the use of picture books and other images to promote creative writing, and a section of CPD materials to help the teacher/session leader develop engaging strategies and approaches for the teaching of narrative and descriptive writing within the classroom.

I hope these materials will inspire you and your students as we celebrate National Writing Day 2018.

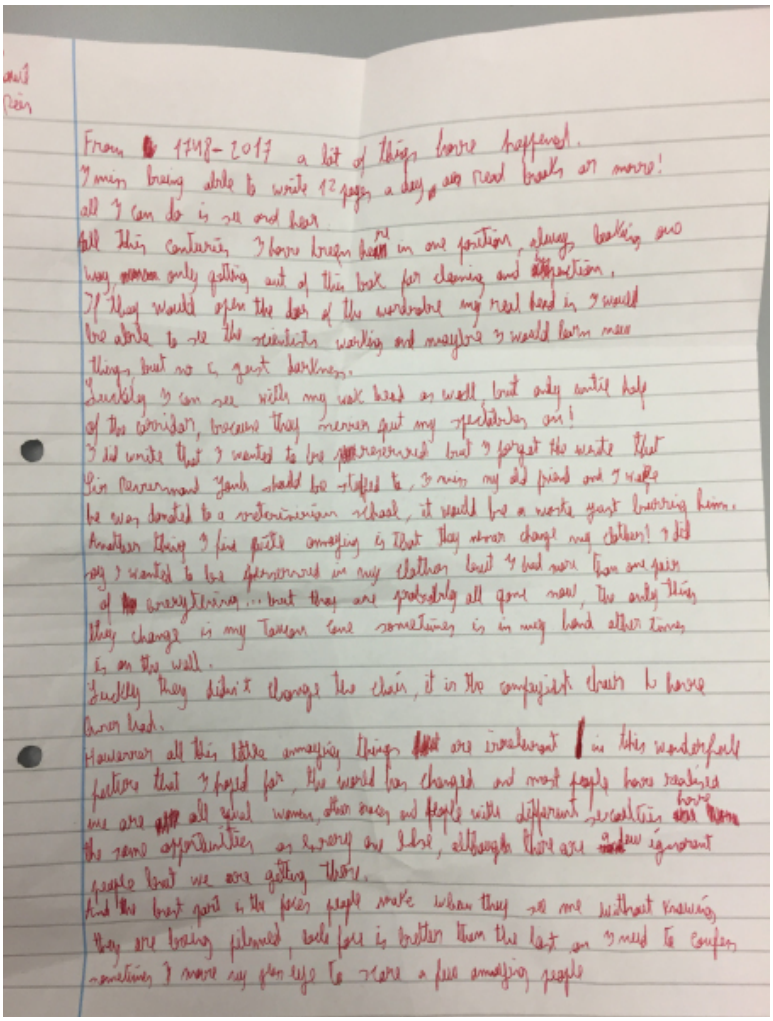
Dan Powell
for National Writing Day

Write Away!

National Writing Day aims to inspire creative writing on a grand scale. Creative writing connects people to their own voice, their own language and their own story. Studies have shown that writing can benefit educational growth, promote wellbeing and build confidence through self-expression. Young people and children are more inclined to write creatively if they see adults around them doing so and writing can benefit people of all ages. This year, for National Writing Day, we're asking schools, students, families and our communities to participate in a free-writing activity called Write Away!

We'd love to see every student and adult in your school engage with this ten-minute activity, perhaps during an assembly, the beginning of a lesson or during form-time on 27th June. Beyond spreading the joy of writing for its own sake, this task is designed to engage everyone in an activity that feeds into all strands of SMSC as well.

The free-writing is stream-of-consciousness writing. You just need to set a timer and keep writing until the timer stops. The theme for Write Away this year is "I feel most free when..." At this stage, all you need to do it plan the time into your school day on 27th June and let your staff know. Nearer the time, we'll issue a resource which will walk everyone through the task via a three-slide power-point presentation. Please check the National Writing Day website on 1st May 2018 when these resources go live.



Narrative Writing Starters

Anomaly game

Generate a list of people and places, the more unusual the better, then put them in bags labelled 'people' and 'places'. Students select one person and one place at random from the bags. They must come up with a convincing story for why their character is there. Responses can be verbal or written. This starter can be supplemented with an additional bag of 'dilemmas' to help them build more developed stories.

Character-invention tasks

1. Each student in the group suggests one thing a character cannot be, with the group leader/teacher listing them on the board. Students must then write for five minutes describing a new character, but it cannot be any of the things listed.
2. Make an A-Z list of the characteristics of your character.

Extending the metaphor

'My teacher is like an… eagle.' Remove 'like'.

Now think about what eagles (or whatever) do, and extend the metaphor.

'My teacher is an eagle swooping round the room, hovering over his students, diving down on innocent prey and demolishing them with the terrible grip of his talons.'

Lying game

Give each student a misdemeanor and ask them to create an elaborate, far-fetched excuse for why they did it. Ask them to come up with a believable excuse. Discuss the difference between the two. What made the second excuse more believable? Discuss the importance of concrete detail and consistency in crafting believable narratives.

Six-word stories

Show students examples of this condensed form of storytelling, e.g. 'No taxidermist loved his daughter more'; 'For sale. Baby shoes. Never Worn.' How many can you write in five minutes? Ten minutes?

Word bingo

Use a bank of words from a variety of word types (noun, verb, adjective). Give the group a word they must include in their first sentence of a story about anything they like. Then, from your list, call out one word every thirty seconds. You can increase or decrease the time between words to raise or lower the pressure on the students.

Writing race

List the things your character has in the fridge or the attic, or small items he/she owns, or expensive items, or things in his/her pockets – first person to fifty things for their character wins. Now write for ten minutes about this character. Include as many of the things from your list as you can.

Developing the Story

Building up

Write a three-sentence story. Beginning, middle and end. Now break each sentence into three more. Then break each new sentence into three more again. Keep doing this to build up the narrative.

Emotion game

Get the class to suggest a longlist of emotions, then come up with as many physical symptoms as they can for each emotion. Describing emotion through physical symptoms is always more powerful than just telling the reader how a character is feeling.

Write 100-word story/paragraph/pen portrait of someone undergoing an emotional event without referring to the emotion by name. To extend this, look at the varied ways to describe abstract emotions: idioms ('heart was in my mouth'); colour ('red-faced'), etc.

Writing from Images

With some of the new English Language GCSEs requiring students to produce a piece of writing in response to a previously unseen image, all under exam conditions, developing skills and techniques for generating ideas rapidly to this kind of stimulus is vital. Many of the starter activities above will help foster confidence and creativity in your students.

Here are some approaches for further developing the skills required to succeed at this specific element of the exam. Try them out in your departments, then roll out those you find most helpful to your students.

Descriptive approaches:

- Zooming in' technique: from large to small scale. Start in the distance, with larger objects, then to the middle distance, and then to the foreground and smaller objects. Then reverse the process and 'zoom out'.
- 'Zooming out' technique: ask students to look for the smallest detail they can find in the image, describe it in detail, then pull out to the middle, describe that, then pull out again to take in the full landscape of the image. This technique can be combined with 'Zooming in' to help craft a controlled structure for descriptive writing tasks.
- Look at the image and think of an abstract noun to describe the overall scene (perhaps an emotion: joy, happiness, loneliness; perhaps a state of being: pain, bravery, beauty; perhaps an idea: belief, trouble, friendship). Now write a list of (mainly) concrete things associated with that abstract concept. Play the game 'If you were a colour, shape, texture, place, sound, taste, item of clothing, anything…' Students write a list and then they use the words/ideas in their description. This helps give the piece a sense of consistency, mood, and helps with originality of ideas.
- Use of 'centre', 'edge', 'light' sentence starters. Give the students a series of prompts. What is at the centre of the image? (They write their response: 'At the centre is…') What is at the edge of the image? Start a sentence with: 'The light…' Start a sentence with: 'In the shade…' What is moving in the image? What is static in the image? What is the brightest colour in the image? Which is the dullest? What is the mood of the piece? The scope of the questions is limited only by your imagination and their relevance to the selected image the students are working from.

Creating a Narrative

1. Give students an image (or let them choose from a pile). Give them an image of a character, then ask them to start making notes. Who is he/she? What is he/she doing here? What has he/she done? What are they going to do? What do they want? Identifying what your protagonist wants is key to creating a narrative. Once you know what your protagonist wants, then someone or something can be the antagonist and try to stop them getting what they want. This is the basis of all conflict in narrative.
2. Questions: have students write for short bursts in response to questions about their image. Where is this place? Who cares for this place? What has happened just moments before this image was taken? If there is a figure in the image, why is he/she there? What has the figure in the image just done? What is the figure about to do? Why did he/she do it? What was trying to stop them? What will happen next? The responses to these questions (and any more like them that you choose to ask) should provide the students with ideas of character, plot and setting that they can use to craft their narrative.
3. The character has kept a secret for a long time. What is the secret? Why did it need to be kept secret?
4. Each student generates their own random list of words from newspapers or from a text you have been studying in class. Next, give them an image of a person and another of a place. Now they must combine these elements to create a story.

The Object

1. Brainstorm some objects that you remember from your childhood, or that have always been in your home, or are important to you in some way. For example:
- Something important that someone gave you.
- An object or piece of clothing that you associate strongly with someone in your family.
- A gift from someone, or an object handed down from an older relative.
- A piece of clothing or a pair of shoes that you associate strongly with a time in your life.
- An object that expresses something important about you, e.g. a musical instrument, a treasured football shirt, a book you read as a child.
2. Choose one of the objects. Brainstorm what the object brings to mind. At this stage don't censor your thoughts. Put down everything. Here's one example:

3. Here a few ideas for more unusual ways of thinking about your object:
- A highpoint or lowpoint in the object's life.
- A fragment or two of conversation that the object might have 'overheard' at key moments in its lifetime.
- A memory of you or your parent/family member using the object.
- What the object reminds you of.
- Words to describe the object – what it looks like, sounds like, makes you feel or think.
4. Talk to someone else about your object, using your brainstormed ideas to help you. Ask them what stood out most about what you said. Which bits seemed most interesting and enjoyable?
5. Think about which of these ideas or angles might make a good starting point for writing about yourself or someone else, using the object as a way of focusing your ideas.
6. Try a few different starting points, as in this example about one special object, a charm bracelet:

> 1. My mother gave me her gold charm bracelet, with its ballet shoe, its coffee pot, its fish and rabbit and tiny little doll. She gave it to me when I was very young, just a little girl, almost as if she wanted to be rid of it herself as quickly as she could.
>
> 2. It was her first fiancé who gave my mother the charm bracelet. She was all set to marry him, till, at the very last moment, she ditched him. He had to sell up everything he'd bought for her, including her beautiful big house, that lay empty, waiting for them to move in. 'Keep the charm bracelet,' he'd said. 'I can't bear to have it back.'
>
> 3. Once upon a time there was a beautiful young girl. She met a rich young prince who asked her to marry him and, of course, as all poor and beautiful girls do, she said yes. The only problem was, she didn't marry him and it didn't end happily ever after, because the beautiful young girl changed her mind.

7. Talk about what's different about these starting points, which you like best and why. You could add a further dimension to this activity by asking students to write in the voice of the object – get the object to tell its story.

EMC English & Media Centre

Contribution

We are grateful to the English and Media Centre for contributing this resource to National Writing Day.

Memory (KS3/4)

Aim: encouraging students to use memory as a source of inspiration.

Preparation: photocopy some 'I Remember' pieces. There have been a number of spin-offs from the famous Joe Brainard autobiography. Wendy Cope* and Paul Farley, for example, are among those who contributed to an issue of Areté (aretemagazine.co.uk), which commissioned these pieces. An extract from Paul Farley's 'I Ran All the Way Home' includes the lines:

> I remember going for brawn, and the sign in Ernie the Butcher's: A missing knife is a danger to all.
>
> I remember a lad held a knife to my throat on the 73 for a laugh.
>
> I remember one night in bed realising I was definitely going to die and wondering what nothing would feel like. This was around the same time as realising the universe went on for ever.

Ice Breaker: Auto Writing (ten minutes)

Ask students to write a diary entry. Stress that it will be private, and they won't have to read it aloud if they don't want to. Encourage them to write using emotions, describing how certain situations felt.

Exercise One: 'I Remember' (twenty minutes)

Give students Wendy Cope's 'I Remember' pieces to read, or read them aloud to the students.

Feedback (ten minutes):

Contribution

We are grateful to the National Association for Writers in Education for contributing this resource to National Writing Day.
Photo credit: http://www.ajlevy.co.uk

Legendary Poems

The poet John Canfield shares his advice on writing thrilling poems about legends ...

One of the problems of writing poems is the blank page. How do you get started? But for generations poets and other writers have taken inspiration from the myths, legends and tales passed down through the ages.

I have a poem in Falling out of the Sky: Poems about Myths and Monsters, published by The Emma Press which is about the legend of Jan Tregeagle, a story I heard when I was growing up in Cornwall. Tregeagle was a giant, scary figure, who eventually is doomed to empty a lake with a limpet shell, a bit like the Greek myth of Sisyphus.

Here's the start of the poem:

Beyond the River Tamar, to the west -
when all the miner's wheelhouses still turn
and stand porth-proud, an age before their waste,
the ground beneath them filled with golden tin -

this county, Cornwall, hosts a magistrate,
a steward, lawyer, landlord, six feet tall;
a swindler, thief, a liar and a cheat;
and those he cannot steal from, he will kill.

In order to start writing the poem I wrote down a summary of everything I knew about the story.

- Where does the story take place?
- When does the story take place?
- What do they look like?
- What happens to the people in the story?
- How does it end

Then, because I was writing a poem, rather than a prose version of the story, I tried to think of interesting ways to describe things: 'porth-proud' for the old mining wheelhouses, 'golden tin' under the ground, then went on to describe what I imagined Tregeagle looked like. I ended up using a refrain that appears throughout the poem, like a chorus in a song to describe him:

Tower-tall with burning eyes,
arms that stretch out forty-span,
lips that only spit out lies,
Tregeagle is a wicked man.

I repeated the refrain every few stanzas, but changed the words slightly as the story progressed. I like using rhyme and regular meter (de dum, de dum, de dum, de dum, de dum), I find the constraint helps me to really think about what I want to say and only use what's necessary, and the rhyme forces me into thinking of images I might not otherwise have come up with. But not everyone thinks like that, and the brilliant thing about poetry is it doesn't matter if it's metrical or if it rhymes or not, as long as it uses interesting, musical words.

So, think about a story you know, a legend, a myth or a fairy-tale. Maybe a story that is set where you live. Now write down and all the things you know about it using the list of questions above.

Now, try and write one line of poetry to start the story. Now write another. And another. And another.

You could write one line for each question. Or you could write a whole stanza for each question (a stanza is another word for a verse and can be as long or as short as you'd like).Can you write a refrain that describes your main character?

The poem can be short or long, you just need to tell us the story as interestingly and poetically as you can.

Contribution

We are grateful to John Canfield and The Poetry School for contributing this resource to National Writing Day.

POETRY SCHOOL

Ask A Poet

How it Works

Watch an 'Ask a Poet' video interview and discover a contemporary poet and learn about how they write. Reflect on how you write and try out the writing exercise provided.There is no 'good' or 'bad' writing, the aim is to try new things and to play with language. Have fun and don't forget to share your work with us! Click here for the 'Ask a Poet' video

Objectives

To discover and learn about a contemporary poet

To learn about how you could apply tips from a professional writer

To play with language and experiment with a new writing exercise

Step One

With a partner take turns interviewing each other using the following questions. The aim is to reflect on what writing means to you.

3. What do you think makes good writing?
4. What could you do to help improve your writing?
5. How do you overcome writer's block?
6. What inspires you to write? (it could be a blog, speech, diary, poem or story)
7. What do you find hard about writing?

Step Two

Read and discuss the poem 'THE KINGDOM OF GRAVITY' by poet Nick Makoha.

1. What is the poem about?
2. What poetic devices are used in the poem?
3. What lines in the poem do you find interesting or striking and why?

Contribution

We are grateful to the Ministry of Stories for contributing this resource to National Writing Day.

MINISTRY OF STORIES

Step three

Read and discuss the poem 'THE KINGDOM OF GRAVITY' by poet Nick Makoha.

1. What is the poem about?
2. What poetic devices are used in the poem?
3. What lines in the poem do you find interesting or striking and why?

THE KINGDOM OF GRAVITY

We are not Alexander, who conquered worlds
giving them new tongues. But we share the story
of a ship resting on an African river, unbuckling
at its shore, awakened by the nights cold hard rain,
staring at the face of the Nile as it reminds you.

You are a hawk silent in the voice of a midnight universe
What makes a man name a city after himself;
asking bricks to be bones, asking the wind
to breathe like the lungs of the night,
asking the night to come closer, to speak
to you as a tribe, asking the tribe to sleep,
asking sleep to loosen its language, asking
language to dream. Come close to me.

Can you not see that I am in search of fire?
The unshapen song of light. In my mouth
is a name hovering like smoke, spoken to me
by the oracle. Like others, I was in search
of a forest, a place to call home.

But what can I tell you about Kingdom,
about having the world at your feet?
When you have seen all the earth's boundary,
you will crave for mirrors searching for them in streams,
and when the river looks back at you
how will you be sure that nothing is lost?

Step four

Take a line from the poem that you like and use it to freewrite about leaving a person, place or thing behind. It could be leaving a country, a friend, bad or good situation or a loved item. Use the line as a starter line or weave it into the poem.

Contribution

We are grateful to the Ministry of Stories for contributing this resource to National Writing Day.

MINISTRY OF STORIES

Poetry and Creative Writing Toolkit

Here are two exciting exercises to try with your class. We have chosen to use Wordsworth poems that are featured on the GCSE poetry clusters (Edexcel and Eduqas) as inspiration but the exercises could be linked to other poems that you chose.

The Wordsworth poem A Complaint is about a failing friendship. The images Wordsworth uses are all connected with water: first flowing to represent a healthy relationship, then still when things go wrong.

A Complaint

There is a change – and I am poor Your love hath been,
nor long ago, A fountain at my fond heart's door,
Whose only business was to flow; And flow it did; not taking heed
Of its own bounty, or my need.

What happy moments did I count! Bliss was I then all bliss above!
Now for that consecrated fount
Of murmuring, sparkling, living love, What have I? Shall I dare to tell?
A comfortless and hidden well.

A well of love – it may be deep – I trust it is, - and never dry:
What matter? If the waters sleep In silence and obscurity.
- Such change, and at the very door
Of my fond heart, hath made me poor.

- Using figurative language from the same subject area, or semantic field, is a good way to give creative writing a spine and coherence.
- Ask the class to make a list of things connected with a subject area. This could be something concrete: the human body or animals; something they enjoy: football, music, food; or even something connected to work in the classroom: weather, electricity. You can either make one class list or ask everyone to choose their own subject. Encourage students to come up with verbs as well as nouns; so, for parts of the body, as well as 'hand' and 'foot', you might have 'breathing' or 'bleed'.
- Next everyone writes a poem, perhaps, at least initially, with the same title: 'A Walk in the Woods', 'A Day at the Beach' using the list as inspiration for as much of the figurative language as possible.

Please turn over

Contribution

We are grateful to the Wordsworth Trust for contributing this resource to National Writing Day.

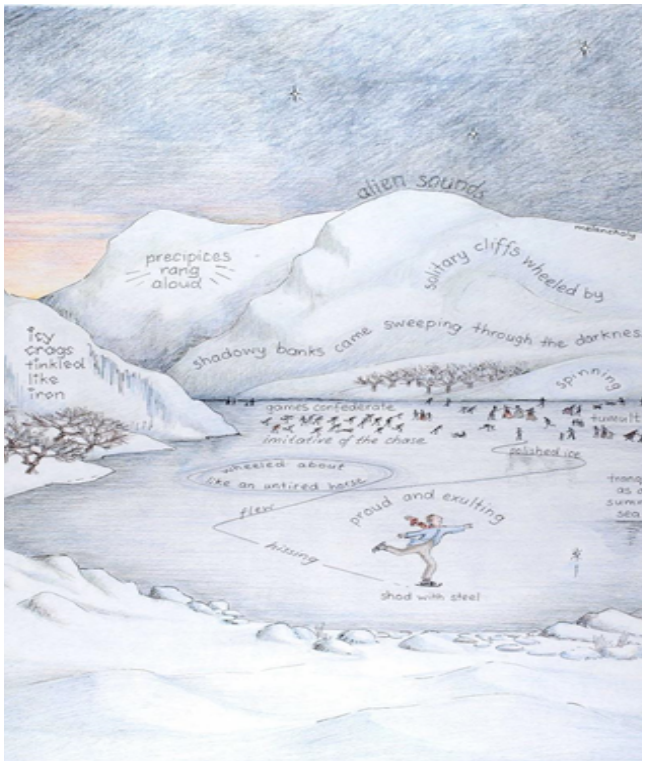
WORDSWORTH TRUST

Spots of Time

In his autobiographical poem The Prelude Wordsworth describes 'spots of time' as moments that happen, especially in childhood, that continue to be of importance through the years – usually because they have sparked his imagination, or slightly changed his understanding of the world around him. These moments are often connected with emotion, but not necessarily life changing in themselves, and they happen outside in the landscape.

This picture was drawn to illustrate an example where Wordsworth describes ice-skating on frozen Esthwaite Water as a boy.

- First look at the picture and the poem with the class
- Ask them to think of something they really enjoy doing outside: horse riding, cycling, walking, going to the park
- Next, everyone draws a picture, following the Wordsworth example, with themselves in the middle and the landscape around them
- Then, populate the picture with words and phrases associated with the activity – encourage the use of poetic devices such as alliteration, simile, metaphor and personification. If you look closely at the picture, some of the words have been written in ways that reflect their meaning e.g. flew, which the class can also try.
- Finally, use the words and phrases to write a poem or short prose piece about the activity.



Please turn over

Contribution

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Excerpt of Wordsworth Prelude 1799

And in the frosty season when the sun
Was set, and, visible for many a mile,
The cottage windows through the twilight blazed,
I heeded not the summons: clear and loud
The village clock tolled six;I wheeled about
Proud and exulting like an untired horse
That cares not for its home.
All shod with steel
We hissed along the polished ice, in games
Confederate, imitative of the chase
And woodland pleasures, the resounding horn,
The pack loud bellowing, and the hunted hare.
So through the darkness and the cold we flew,
And not a voice was idle: with the din,
Meanwhile, the precipices rang aloud,
The leafless trees and every icy crag
Tinkled like iron, while the distant hills
Into the tumult sent an alien sound
Of melancholy not unnoticed while the stars,
Eastward, were sparkling clear, and in the west
The orange sky of evening died away.
Not seldom from the uproar I retired
Into a silent bay, or sportively
Glanced sideway leaving the tumultuous throng,
To cut across the shadow of a star
That gleamed upon the ice: and oftentimes
When we had given our bodies to the wind
And all the shadowy banks on either side
Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still
The rapid line of motion, then at once
Have I, reclining back upon my heels,
Stopped short; yet still the solitary cliffs
Wheeled by me, even as if the earth had rolled
With visible motion her diurnal round;
Behind me did they stretch in solemn train
Feebler and feebler, and I stood and watched
Till all was tranquil as a summer sea.

Contribution

We are grateful to the Wordsworth Trust for contributing this resource to National Writing Day.

WORDSWORTH TRUST

Response to 'Text' by Imtiaz Dharker (KS4/5)

I am sending a message again.

Maybe you can't hear it
through all the noise of lights
and the dangerous way things move

in that other city
where I think you are,
if I have the dates right, though
of course I could be wrong.

If you expected the message,
you would stand like this,
with your eyes open and focussed
on the screen, your ears closed.

The city I am in has lost
its volume control.
Every person in the place
is tuned to maximum.

Can you see the text?
Just to ask if you are safe
and well?

A phone shrills, a clock explodes,
in the next room, a TV switches on.
Everywhere, the sound of sirens, drills.
Cars screech, horns blare.

Where
are you?
Why have you stopped singing?

Imtiaz Dharker

Opening up the poem

- Who might be the speaker of this poem?
- What clues does the poem offer about the speaker?
- To whom might the text be addressed?
- What clues does the poem offer about the relationship between the speaker and the person being addressed?
- In many ways, this poem is ambiguous (open to more than one interpretation; not having one obvious meaning).
- What is ambiguous in the poem? Why might Dharker have chosen to include such ambiguity? How is the ambiguity created?
- How important are the descriptions of the city in the poem?
- How would you describe the tone of the poem? Dejected? Elegiac? Wistful? Anxious? Panicked? Uneasy? Impatient? Frustrated? Angry? Something else…?
- Which words or phrases are most memorable? Do any seem incongruous?
- How does the final word – 'singing' – affect your reading of the poem

Please turn over

Research

- 'The city I am in has lost / its volume control' Research the issue of noise pollution. What are its effects on humans and wildlife?
- 'I'm sending a message again' Investigate the history of the text message. Conduct a survey of family and friends: how many use SMS text messages? What other methods of communication do they use?

Climbing inside the poem

- Experiment with volume when reading the poem aloud. Which lines of the poem should be shouted, which whispered?
- Debate: does modern telecommunication (smartphones, text messaging, Skype, social media etc.) bring us closer together, or create more distance between us?
- Many of Imtiaz Dharker's collections contain her own drawings alongside her poems. Why not create an artwork inspired by this poem, or any of the other National Poetry Day in Scotland postcard poems?

Building on the poem (writing)

- Compose a poem in response to this one, writing from the perspective of the intended recipient.
- Close your eyes and listen to the sounds around you: what can you hear? Listen for background sounds that you might usually ignore. Try this in different places: at the bus-stop, in your bedroom, in the woods… Then write a poem about a place using only sounds to convey the landscape.
- "all the noise of lights" is an example of synaesthesia, a poetic technique in which one sense is described in terms of another. Make a list of concrete and abstract nouns, then describe them using synaesthesia: what colour is ambition? how does a beam of sunlight smell? what texture does a rainbow have? what sound do the rings on Saturn make? Use your best example(s) as the starting point for a poem.

- Create found poetry using your own text messages. Scroll back through your phone and use words and phrases from texts you have sent or received to create a new text. Start by copying out interesting or unusual phrases. Look for patterns: repetitions, rhymes, rhythms. Try putting incongruous words and phrases together to hear how they sound.
- Write a poem titled 'The Sound of Silence'. You could use the absence of sound to tell a story, or build a poem around a sound-based oxymoron (contradiction) e.g. the unfamiliar sound of a door not being slammed; the booming echo of a silent yawn; the noisy chatter of glances and stares in the quiet carriage of a train…

Further reading and links to selected books

- Purdah (Oxford University Press, 1989)
- Leaving Fingerprints (Bloodaxe Books, 2009)
- Postcards from God (Bloodaxe Books, 1997)
- I Speak for the Devil (Bloodaxe Books, 2001)
- The Terrorist At My Table (Bloodaxe Books UK, 2006)
- Over the Moon (Bloodaxe Books, 2014)

Scottish Poetry Library
Bringing people and poems together

National Poetry Day

Contribution

We are grateful to the Scottish Poetry School and National Poetry Day for contributing this resource to National Writing Day.

Whose Rhyme Is It Anyway? (45 - 60 minutes)

1. Place a selection of different poetry books on a table, making sure there are more than enough books for everyone.

2. Ask everyone to pick one book each.

3. Ask each person to explain why they picked this book, encourage them to talk about the title, front cover and whether or not they have heard of the author before.

4. Give everyone 10 minutes to select a poem in the book and read it to themselves a few times.

5. Give everyone a post-it note and ask them to write down a line from the poem they have read.

6. Give everyone a second post-it note and ask them to create and write down a line that copies the first line in some way, encourage them to think about both the subject matter and style.

7. Ask each person to read out both lines without saying which one came from the book and which one they created.

8. Ask the rest of the group to guess which is which and to give reasons for why they think this.

9. Discuss how it felt for everyone to copy someone else's line and style, encourage them to think about what they enjoyed about this as well as what was challenging.

10. Give everyone 10 minutes to do a free write using the line they created as their starting line.

(A free write is stream of consciousness writing, where you keep writing non-stop until the time is up. If you have more time available this can be redrafted and developed into a more refined piece of writing)

Contribution

We are grateful to Dean Atta and for contributing this resource to National Writing Day.

Non-Verbal Storytelling (EAL students)

Aim: to warm students up, allow them to get to know each other, start thinking about characters.

So much storytelling is non-verbal. Gestures and expressions are used around the world as an international language, meaning that even those with limited English-language skills can take part in this exercise.

Introduction (teacher-led; ten minutes):

To introduce the idea of non-verbal communication, the teacher demonstrates a few simple actions for the students to identify, for example: kicking a football, scoring a goal, using a fishing rod, filling a trolley with shopping.

Next, move on to more subtle expressions that start to help you think about character-building. We are starting to get 'under the skin' of the characters we might want to include in our plot later. Ideas might include a bully, a clown, or somebody thinking.

Main activity (pupil-led; twenty minutes):

Now it's the students' turn to come up with as many non-verbal impersonations as they can, in pairs or in small groups, for two or three minutes. This is fast, thinking-on-your-feet stuff. At the end of the three minutes, each group demonstrates their gestures to see how many everyone else can guess.

This final part can be lots of fun, but there's usually also the starting point for a serious discussion about stereotyping, which can be very revealing when working with a group of children from diverse backgrounds.

Often, the people we choose to mimic as part of this exercise are based on stereotypes, because they are easy to identify and often quite funny. But, ask your students to think about why stereotypes might also be harmful. What are they based on? And how might they limit the characters we want to build in our story? Is anyone truly like their stereotype, or aren't we all many-sided individuals with lots of different qualities? In order to build really original, authentic characters, and to avoid clichés, we need to avoid the stereotype.

Most characters in fiction have a little bit of some of the people the writer knows or has met at some point in their life. Discuss common human characteristics and personality traits. Use one from someone you know, share it with the students and then get them to work in pairs and find out a few characteristics that some of their friends/family have, then share them with the group. This is the starting point for great characters.

This exercise is drawn from a wider creative-writing toolkit for secondary-school teachers working with children for whom English is an additional language. The full toolkit, It's Our Write, was developed by Richard O'Neill, at the end of a three-year residency at Babington Community College in Leicester.

For further information (and for more information about Richard O'Neill), visit: http://www.writingeastmidlands.co.uk/services/its-our-write-toolkit/

Contribution

We are grateful for Writing East Midlands and Richard O'Neill for contributing this resource for National Writing Day.

WRITING EAST MIDLANDS

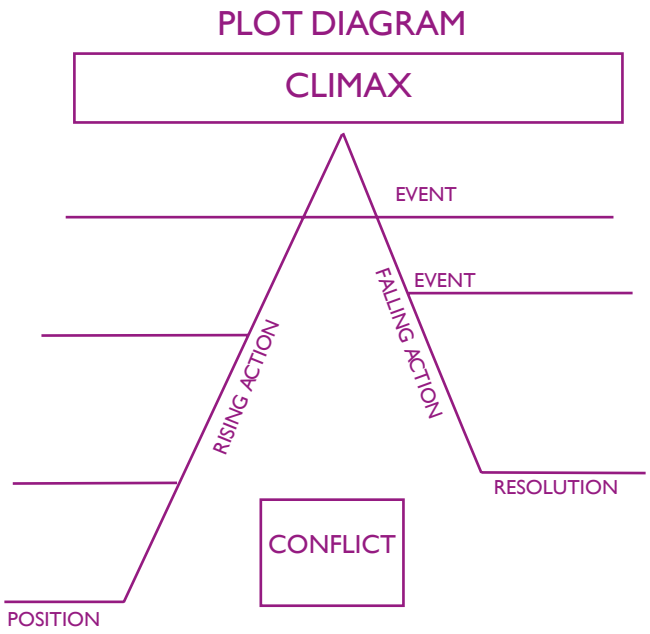
Writing in a Group

Collaborative Story

Use a map or diagram of a communal area (e.g. block of flats or shopping centre). Each student is allocated a space within that area. They create a character that inhabits the space (e.g. Ayesha runs the nail bar on Level 2), developing a backstory and as much information about their character as possible (this can lead to separate activities; for example, students could interview each other about their respective character).

When the characters are ready, introduce an inciting incident. Students develop a reaction to the inciting incident (the event that moves the story from exposition and into the first of the series of rising action events) from their characters. What follows needs careful management and editing, but each student takes responsibility for their character in the story that ensues.

A group might begin by discussing the inciting incident, what they have seen, what to do next. The story can take on a classical structure, with the group deciding on what their characters where doing at the status quo at the opening of the story (exposition), before considering the multiple steps of rising action and what their characters did in response to these events. Once the group has decided what the climax of the story is, they must each then decide how their character responds to it. They can use any or all of their writing about their characters to help them with 'filling in the gaps' of the story.



An Exquisite Corpse

Essentially, this is a game of Consequences.

Give the students a subject (e.g. 'being in the city' or 'spending time with your friends'). One student writes a line on a piece of paper and folds it over and passes it to the next student, and so on round the class. Read the results. This could lead to a longer piece of writing. (See 'The Crow' in Chandenance, 'P.S.' in Crumbs on a Page and 'One Day' in And So It Begins).

Variations: Give students rules/formulae for each sentence, e.g. they can only use four-letter words; no use of the letter 'e'; no use of the noun 'to be' or its derivations; address every sentence to 'You'. The variations are endless!

Free Writing to Music

Find three jazz (or other genre!) tracks, each with a distinct beginning, middle and end. Get students to listen then write a story following the arc of the music.

Poetry Machine

Discuss the difference between abstract and concrete nouns. Ask students to write down four concrete nouns and four abstract nouns on pieces of card. Then ask them to write the definitions of these nouns on different-coloured pieces of card. Shuffle all the definitions together and, separately, shuffle the nouns together. Give the nouns to one student and the definitions to another. Ask for a noun to be read aloud followed by a random definition. They will see that some produce poetic definitions and some don't. You can 'catch' the poem by writing down the ones the students tell you to, the ones they think 'work' as surreal metaphors.

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