

# CREATIVE POWER

INVESTIGATING CREATIVE WRITING & ITS VALUE

EDITED BY FRANCIS GILBERT

*Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

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Dr. Francis Gilbert, November 2022

*Creative Power*

Dedication

*To all creative writing educators devoted to pursuing lives well led.*

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# **LIFE'S A CABARET: SALLY HOROWITZ**

## PERFORMANCE, WRITING AND SUBVERSIVE COMMUNITIES

Dear Creative Writing and Education Student,

I'm on the Creative Writing and Education masters course, like you. Although by the time you read this I will have graduated. For now, I'm sitting in a cafe near Finsbury Park. I moved North a few weeks ago, until then I lived down the road from Goldsmiths. I'm happy to have moved. I live a few minutes from one of my best friends in London – someone I met through the course. Her name is Autumn. Together we run a literary cabaret. It's held each month at a little dark bar called Mascara Bar. You should come!

Actually, the cabaret is why I'm writing to you. It's become a huge part of my life. I moved to London a year ago from New York. I didn't know anyone in the city. But now, 8 months later, I have friends, community and a successful literary event. I want to tell you how I did it, because I realise now that the point of doing a masters degree is not just to get good marks and to graduate. It's to turn learning into a real life practice. The cabaret is an extension and expansion of the course.

But I couldn't have done any of it on my own.

A few weeks before the course started I received an email from the head of my department. There was an opportunity to work with a theatre company called Punchdrunk. My background is in theatre and performance so I volunteered. One other course mate volunteered as well. Autumn. We arranged to meet at a cafe near the university to talk about the project. I got there early, ordered a cappuccino and waited. I had no idea what Autumn looked like and my phone was dead. I worried I would miss her. But when a woman in a leopard print button down and a huge smile on her face walked through the door I knew it had to be

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her. We sat down together and fell into a conversation about life, love, creative writing, and going back to school in our 30s. By the end of the meeting I'd made my first friend in London.

School started. Time passed. I settled into life in London. But I felt like something was missing.

'What is it?' Autumn asked me after class. We went to the Rose Pub with our coursemates, but everyone else left already. Autumn and I were always the last to go. A woman was singing and playing guitar in the corner of the bar.

'I don't know.'

'Maybe you should perform again.'

'I want to focus on writing.' I pulled my coat around me. It was beginning to get cold at night.

'You know you can do both,' she said.

'If I'm in a band or a play it feels like that's all there is. I'm scared of losing my sense of purpose. I want to write!'

And I was writing. More than ever. I wrote before bed. And in the mornings. But I had a growing sense of isolation. I didn't like that only a few friends and tutors saw my work. I longed for the sense of community that performance creates.

'You know,' I said, 'Maybe we should start a performance night, but for writing.'

'Like a poetry reading?'

'Kind of, but more theatrical. And not just poetry. You can read whatever you want! And more gritty. Like a cabaret.'

'I love that. Let's expand the definition of what literary means. It's any writing.'

'Do you really want to do this?' I asked.

'Yes.' Autumn took out a notebook and a pen. 'But I've never put on an event before.'

'I used to set up shows all the time in New York. We don't need money. We just need time. And we have to be willing to do everything ourselves.'

'Let's do it.' Autumn wrote down the words Literary Cabaret on top of her notebook. 'Should we have it at school?' We both shook our heads. We were silent for a moment. "What would be your perfect location?" She asked.

'I'd love a little dark bar. Like, Weimer-era aesthetics.'

Autumn pulled out her phone and showed me a picture of a bar with a little stage and several round tables set up around it. 'This is Mascara Bar. My friend has a jazz night here.'

Autumn and I decided to meet at Mascara Bar the following week and talk to the owner.

She called me a few days later. 'Should we have a host?'

'Like an Emcee?'

'Yes!'

'My friend Tobias has a drag act. I think he would be great at it.'

'Amazing! See you at Mascara Bar on Wednesday?'

'See you then.'

I was late getting there. It was my first time going so far up North in London and I boarded the wrong train. An hour and three trains later, I walked up to the bar. There were Irish flags strung up along the awning. Autumn was sitting at a wooden table outside drinking a beer.

She jumped up when she saw me. 'I just talked to the owner. Maggie. She's incredible and she loves the idea! She's never heard of anything like it. Her only rule is no nudity.'

'I'm sure we can accommodate that.'

'You've got to meet her.'

I ordered a drink and sat down. It was evening, and there was a chill in the air. From behind I heard, 'Is this the other one?' I turned and saw a short woman standing with her hands on her hips. Her blonde hair was pulled into a tight bun.

I got up from the table. 'Yes.'

'Oh sit down. I'll take a seat with you. I'd have a drink but I don't drink anymore.' She pulled out a pouch of tobacco and began to roll a cigarette. 'So, are you going to sell tickets for this cabaret?' She peered at me from behind enormous black rimmed glasses.

Autumn and I looked at each other. I knew we were thinking the same thing. 'We want to make it free,' she said.

'It's really important to us that it's accessible to everyone,' I added. 'In terms of money and also opening it up to people who have never read before or who might be a little shy about their work.'

'Tickets would add expectations for the event. I think it might make people nervous.'

'You have to make some money from it.' Maggie looked from one to the other. 'Well, 10 percent of the bar it is. That's better anyway.'

She gave us her email address and disappeared into the bar. Autumn picked up her beer and held it in her hand. 'You know,' she said 'I think most of the time what I don't like about poetry readings is that they're not silly enough. They're so serious. We should make our event really silly.'

'And not so polished.'

'I don't think we could be polished if we tried.'

Over the next weeks Autumn and I met frequently. We locked down a date for our first event. The last Thursday of November. Autumn made an instagram account for the cabaret and showed a gift for social media promotion. We both told everyone we knew about the event.

A week before the cabaret we met with Tobias at Mascara Bar. This time it was too cold to sit outside. We grabbed a table near the stage. 'We need something to warm up the crowd,' Tobias said. He had just finished a drag workshop and knew that audience participation would be key. 'What could it be, though? Nothing too much. This isn't a burlesque! It's still a literary night. Do you guys know any writing exercises?'

Autumn grabbed his hand. 'You're a genius! We'll do writing exercises with the crowd and then read them out loud.'

'Some people won't like that. What if we made it anonymous? We could pass around a hat. That way even people who are shy can have their work read out loud.'

'I love it.'

Then Autumn looked at me, and for a moment a shadow passed over her face. 'I think I'm going to do a safety check before the event. You know, tell people that they can't say any hate speech during our event.'

'Do you think that's necessary?' I asked. 'Who would come to our event that would say something hateful?'

Autumn shrugged. 'You never know. I want this to be a safe space.'

'It will be.'



‘We have to make sure of that.’

‘Ok. Let’s also make sure we have some readers. Nobody has signed up yet.’

By the night of the cabaret three people from our course had agreed to read. It would be their first time on stage. They were nervous but I assured them that it would be a welcoming environment. Autumn, Tobias and I had drafted an opening speech for the night. We would instruct everyone to clap as hard for something that they didn't connect with as they did for a reading they loved. That way everyone was assured a hearty applause.

Autumn and I sat at the bar writing a rough order for the event. I was impressed by how organised she was. I usually ran my events more improvisationally. But I saw now that having as much structure as possible would be beneficial. As guests trickled in, Autumn and I gave each person a pen and a piece of paper. ‘Write an anonymous letter to your crush,’ we said. We decided that instead of writing exercises we would play writing games. A letter to a crush seemed like a fun way to get participants in the night, even if they didn’t want to perform. I collected the anonymous letters in a black hat.

The cabaret started. Autumn did her safety speech. Then, Tobias, in a green wig and black leather dress, took the stage. We agreed earlier that Tobias would be the first act. We called him ‘the sacrificial lamb’. We knew that nobody would want to be the first performer. He was there to break the ice. Tobias had gone a step further, he decided that his performance would be purposely bad. He would make a fool of himself to show that we were open to anything. So he read out his grocery list. “Lettuce. Coffee. Bread...” I planted myself in the audience and when he was done I cheered wildly. The crowd followed suit and soon everyone was cheering and clapping.

Next, we read the anonymous letters. Autumn, Tobias and I each read one. ‘Who wants to read the next one?’ Tobias asked. Nobody moved. I’d spent enough time on stage to know that now the audience needed to be guided. I jumped off stage and went up to Lamis, a friend from the course. I held out my hand. She smiled, took a sip of her drink and went up on stage with me. She picked a letter out of a hat and began to read. When she sat

down again I went over to her table to thank her for reading. 'It was fun!' Lamis said.

'Are you sure you don't want to read tonight?'

'You know what? I think I will.' As more people came up to read the anonymous letters we got more sign-ups. This, we learned, was the best way to get newcomers on stage. We would use something fun and low-stakes, like these games, to acclimate people to the stage.

We ended up filling three 20 minute sets with readers. Afterwards many people told us how happy performing made them feel. So we had our formula now. We would have Autumn's speech, Tobias' performance, my crowd work and plenty of writing games and guests readers. We also decided that each month would have a different theme to make things exciting.

We've held the event eight times already. Many of our audience members attend every single one. We have had almost no issues with the event, besides when a man showed up to an explicitly LGBTQIA reading, went over his allotted time limit and proceeded to flirt with many of the women there. Autumn and I agreed he wouldn't be allowed to read at the cabaret anymore.

But even this hiccup attests to the strength of the night. Autumn and I keep everything running through a mutual respect for each other's vision for the event, open communication and a passion for fostering creativity in our community.

So whatever happens on this MA programme, remember there are always fun and interesting ways to apply what you are learning to the world outside of the university – and that is perhaps the true benefit of the course. Also, if you are looking for a creative community but you can't quite find your scene, maybe try starting one yourself!

Good luck! And come to the cabaret!

Best,  
Sally

## COMMENTARY

I wrote this letter the morning after our latest cabaret. I think of it as an ‘anti-guide.’ I wanted to offer practical advice for setting up events without being didactic. I used an epistolary and narrative and an informal tone incorporating second and first person voice, to tell the story of the cabaret. My hope is to inspire others to find their own unique ways to take creative control of their lives like Autumn and I did with the cabaret.

I realise now that what started out as a way to scratch my performing itch, has become an event that has a vital purpose in my new community in London. It allows people to connect with the part of themselves that is performative, that wants to be seen. It is also a huge catalyst for our audience to generate writing work. The cabaret is both emotionally healing and creatively productive for our attendees.

It has become a community of practice (Wenger 1998). A term which defines, ‘groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.’ (Wenger 198: p1). The three major structures that define a community of practice are ‘domain’ ‘community and ‘practice’ (Wenger 1998: p2) ‘Domain’ refers to the main issue, idea or ethos that the group gathers around. The ‘community’ is the people who meet, united under a shared goal. The ‘practice’ is the set of tools or skills that is developed within the group. The literary cabaret meets these requirements in that it has a strong ideological focus, generates both friendship groups and professional alliances as well allowing for its attendees to develop stronger writing and performance skills.

Autumn and I had skill sets that would help us to run the cabaret – my background in performance and events producing and Autumn’s organisational and networking skills – but neither she nor I had experience hosting literary events. However, for communities of practice, ‘learning is...not seen as the acquisition of knowledge by individuals so much as a process of social participation.’ (Wenger 1998: p2). Through our collaborative

endeavour, a large part of which included conversation and open dialogue – whether in person or in the form of voice notes, text messages and video calls – we learned how to be effective organisers. Eventually carving a niche space for ourselves within the London literary community. We became ‘passionate experts’ (Wenger 1998), united under a shared love for performance, creativity and social inclusivity.

A community of practice can be ‘quite small’ (Wenger 1998: p3), however the literary cabaret generates a much wider field of practice than just Autumn and I. It is exemplary of the concentric movement that is common to many communities of practice. At the centre of the circle is a hub of experts who create the community, while other members are drawn to the centre but begin by participating on the periphery,

Initially people have to join communities and learn at the periphery. As they become more competent they move more to the ‘centre’ of the particular community... The nature of the situation impacts significantly on the process. (Wenger 1998: p3).

As the original creators and the ones that generate excitement and participation in the event, Autumn and I act as the centre of the community. Periphery members include the audience, such as many of our coursemates, who are avid supporters but may perform seldomly or never at all. As periphery members get more comfortable and more engaged in the community they begin to actively participate, getting up to read during our games and eventually sharing their own work on stage. In this way, they move towards the centre. In one notable example of the movement from periphery to centre, one of our original audience members – someone who was originally too shy to read, but soon became an active performer – hosted the event for us when Autumn and I were unable to attend a recent cabaret.

No matter what stage of the centripetal course someone is in, the community of practice would not exist without all its participants. At the cabaret, being an avid audience member is just as important as being a performer. Most often people become both. The ability to become an active participant/creator of the community, to embody the community’s ethos and ideals, is central to a community of practice in which ‘...increasing participation in communities of practice concerns the whole

person acting in the world' (Lave & Wenger 1991: p49). Active participation creates community. A 'whole person' participation leads from the periphery to the centre. And with this participation comes material benefits to a member's writing.

The cabaret allows participants to hear their writing out loud, and to see and hear how their sentences affect an audience. Hearing one's own writing is a vital but often under-utilised tool for creative writing pedagogy, in which reading the text is often valued over listening to or speaking the text. However,

Voicing your own text creates a dialogic relationship between the writer as author and the writer as reader, and enables writers to do two key things. Firstly, it helps them to hear the cadences and rhythms of their own writing, and evaluate if it is satisfying their authorial intentions; secondly, it helps them to stand in the shoes of a reader and sense how the text might appear to them. (Cremin & Myhill 2012: p196)

Many of the writers that come to the cabaret report writing alone and rarely showing their work to others. For many of the regular participants, there have been evident improvements in both their writing work and their performance style.

With games such as 'write a letter to your crush' as well as the other writing activities that we set for our audience, the cabaret allows people who are wary of getting on stage a chance to hear their writing read out loud – albeit, anonymously. This way, we allow for unheard voices to be heard. The ability for anyone to hear their work read out loud without judgement is a far cry from the typical writing classroom in which critique often follows a reading.

Although we met at university, and most of our early audience and participants were members of our MA programme, Autumn and I created a network of participants – both on the periphery and closer to the centre – that extends well beyond the confines of the university setting. Commitment to inclusivity is foundational for the success of our event and our community of practice, 'For a community of practice to function it needs to generate and appropriate a shared repertoire of ideas, commitments and memories.' (Wenger 1998: p 4). Many of our attendees feel uncomfortable within university settings, and are

more familiar with the supportive atmosphere of spoken word events. Although our cabaret is not specifically a spoken word event, in that it does not only showcase poetry but prose and plays as well, it shares a similar political and social ethos as that typically associated with spoken word.

The term 'Spoken Word movement' characterises the genre's political nature. Spoken Word artists, who often also call themselves poets, come from many walks of life and seldom conform to the traditional image of the solitary poet in their lonely garret. They might run workshops and compete in slam events. They may be politically active, involved in human rights or environmental campaigns. Beliefs about development of self-knowledge, transformative practice, and community empowerment underpin many artists' working practices. (Dymoke 2017: p230)

'Community empowerment' is a core value within the literary cabaret's community of practice as well, and therefore the structure of the cabaret has to reflect that value. One of the few rules for the night is that the audience must cheer for everyone who has read, regardless of whether they are emotionally connected with the piece or not. This idea is taken directly from spoken word events, where 'audiences are encouraged to respond enthusiastically after each performed piece, rather than wait and applaud politely at the end of a set as they might at a traditional poetry reading.' (Dymoke 2017: p231). The guaranteed applause creates a feeling of acceptance and promotes the idea that failure is impossible at our cabaret. There is no right or wrong way to read or to write, and every act of performance is commendable. Mistakes, chaos and messiness are praised. This is in direct opposition to most writing workshops where,

Creative writing workshops typically feature a gag rule and emphasise purported flaws. This structure limits students' meaningful engagement with each other's work; positions the author as inherently flawed; and positions other participants as authority figures, passing judgement without articulating their aesthetic standards. (Kearns 2009: p790)

The event itself is an example of the Wengerian concept of reification, which Wenger defines as,

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the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into "thingness" ... With the term reification, I mean to cover a wide range of processes that include making, designing, representing, naming, encoding and describing as well as perceiving, interpreting, using, reusing, decoding and recasting (Wenger, 1998, p.58-9).

Reification is a central concept to communities of practice because it gives form and body to the ethos of the group. That the literary cabaret's reification happens at Mascara Bar is key to the shared ideals of our particular community of practice. It was very important to Autumn and I that our event be accessible to everyone interested in writing and performing. Universities, despite their efforts to be accessible, often carry with them the weight of patriarchal and heteronormative authority. Mascara Bar, and its owner Maggie, are committed to producing events that are inclusive and free. They hold LGBTQIA community events and keep an open flow of dialogue with event organisers to make the space as safe and inviting as possible. Mascara Bar also has a casual and relaxed environment, with plenty of dark and smokey ambience, that is in direct opposition aesthetically to any classroom setting I have ever been in. The setting for the reification of the literary cabaret, matches our 'domain' (Wenger 1998). The form of the event follows and promotes our ideology. Many participants report feeling free at Mascara Bar.

With our choice of venue, Autumn and I take a New Materialist approach. Under a New Materialist lens, matter such as the objects in a room, and the room itself, has an 'agential' capacity to affect the humans who engage with it (Coole & Frost 2010: p181). Mascara Bar, then, with its dark corners and speakeasy-esque atmosphere becomes almost as central an actor within the concentric community of practice as Autumn and I. Objects and physical space under a New Materialist lens create 'affective flows' (Fox & Alldred 2015) which, produce emotional and social changes,

The materialities considered in new materialist approaches include human bodies; other animate organisms; material things; spaces, places and the natural and built environment

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that these contain; and material forces including gravity and time. Also included may be abstract concepts, human constructs and human epiphenomena such as imagination, memory and thoughts; though not themselves 'material', such elements have the capacity to produce material effects. (Fox & Alldred 2015: p1)

Mascara Bar's ambience, combined with the open and freewheeling atmosphere that Autumn and I strive to create, produces an effect that not only promotes freedom within the craft of creative writing, but allows for a certain freedom from the societal pressures of everyday life, and from the personal emotional repression of the audience members. At the cabaret, strangers meet and chat. People expose themselves. Many love affairs have started at the cabaret. The interactive crowd games such as 'write a letter to your crush' encourage a safe expression of desire that often finds no place within the hegemonic and patriarchal world outside of the cabaret. This libidinal freedom is fundamental to the form of cabaret in general.

Ever since I saw the movie *Cabaret* when I was ten years old I have been fascinated by cabaret as an art form. Even at a young age I knew that there was something subversive about it, cabaret offers both an escape from the outside world and a way to critique the norms and expectations of standard society. Cabaret emerged in the 1880s in France as a place where people could go to drink, talk and watch light entertainment in the form of musical numbers and humorous skits— often political satires (Britannica). Humour is deeply embedded into the form of cabaret. Thus, all of the games we play at the literary cabaret incorporate an almost child-like silliness. However, this light humour has a very powerful affective flow (Fox & Alldred 2015) on audience members,

Laughter is the expression of an affective energy: it literally moves us. Kant put this by saying that the gratification of laughter is a corporeal, 'animal' pleasure, one emerging from 'the furtherance of the vital bodily processes' and causing a 'feeling of health'. (Brigstocke 2014: p220)

It connects us with our bodies and our physicality, while also promoting a sense of defiance against societal standards. According to philosopher Alexander Bain, laughter and humour



is ‘a rebellion against order – a temptation to a dangerous moment of anarchy against the severe demands of social constraint’ (Bain 1865). The cabaret night, because of – rather than despite of – its loose and light quality promotes a freedom of sexual expression and political rebellion. Despite the light-hearted nature of the night, many read poems revealing intimate personal truths as well as exploring political issues

The choice to combine cabaret and creative writing constitutes a radical shift from most poetry events, which often have a serious atmosphere and are held in traditional ‘literary’ spaces. In this sense, our cabaret is aligned with radical arts movements such as the OuLiPo group in France, who sought to

Take to the streets, to leave behind traditional venues and institutional spaces (museum, library, bookstore, etc.) (Ardenne, 2002, Volvey, 2008). This movement took root in an approach purported as alternative, experimental, militant and transgressive, concerned over publicising and democratising the craft, framing it and opening it up for discussion in the public square. (Molina 2018: 4-12)

One of the values that Autumn and I share most strongly is ‘democratising the craft’ (Molina) of writing. To give underrepresented voices a stage. And although Autumn and I are at the centre of the community of practice, we do not see ourselves as leaders. Everyone who attends the event participates in the creation of it and is allowed to speak and write in a way that is meaningful and personal. The literary cabaret follows educator Paolo Freire’s concept of “co-intentional education” (Freire 2014: p69), wherein both leaders and participants in a group construct knowledge together through “reflection and action” (Freire 2014: p69). We ask for feedback on our event from the crowd and incorporate their wishes into the fabric of the community, such as when a recent participant asked if we could hold our event in South London to engage a different and more diverse audience and so we worked collaboratively with her to hold a special one night only event in Peckham.

There is an element of defiance embedded within the literary cabaret. Like many communities of practice, Autumn and I are

joined under a shared passion to learn through action and engagement (Wenger 1998) – to create our own standards for literature – rather than the standards set by the university and mainstream publishing houses. We are specifically interested in expanding the definition of what constitutes and is deserving of the term ‘literary.’ We want people to consider themselves writers who may not feel worthy of the title. Prior to the cabaret, I did not feel worthy of the term ‘writer’ because I’d never been published. Now I realise that a writer is simply someone who writes. Text messages, social media comments, emails, etc/all constitute writing and can be made with varying degrees of creativity. A very well crafted tweet is just as much a creative work as a novelist’s sentence. Autumn and I wanted to set aside space for this type of writing during the cabaret night.

In the spirit of expanding the definition of ‘literary’, I chose to write my ‘anti-guide’ in the form of a letter. I wanted to speak directly to my reader and use a narrative, informal tone. Just like with the cabaret, I wanted to allow myself to use the form of expression most natural to me. I feel uncomfortable being didactic, a letter and ‘anti-guide’ suits my style and allows me to speak in my authentic voice. This letter, then, becomes a part of the reification of my community of practice just as much as the cabaret itself. With this letter and commentary I hope to broaden the scope of the cabaret and extend a warm and welcome invitation to my readers to come and join our community of practice.

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# **LEARNING, UNLEARNING, AND LEARNING AGAIN: TAMAR MOSHKOVITZ**

## **A SELF-PEDAGOGY TOWARDS COMPASSIONATE, AUTONOMOUS CREATIVE WRITING**

I had always been good at learning what I'd been told to learn. I thrived under the regimented day-to-day routine of school: I got the answer right, I received excellent marks on my GCSEs and A Levels, I was designated as gifted and talented, I was a joy to have in class. By the time I had completed my undergraduate degree, however, I was completely disillusioned with formal education, sapped of creativity, and convinced I was stupid. So entrenched was my reliance on the ostensibly immutable value of marks and grades that I had felt a deep sense of loss. I later came to understand that it was this very throughline in educational settings – one that emphasizes stratification, prioritises modes of knowledge over others, and assesses students against a rigid and self-contained set of expectations – that had guided and ultimately damaged my understanding of learning and success, particularly in the study of creative writing.

In this essay, I seek to share my process of unlearning through a self-pedagogy which focused on speaking back to and deterritorialising these deeply internalized notions of education, knowledge, and evaluation. I will showcase my experimentation with a more organic and forgiving model of the writing and learning process centered on instinct, enjoyment, and autonomy and utilizing techniques such as free writing, gamification, and reflection. I will explore the work of other researchers who have problematised existing pedagogies theorized alternatives that aim to challenge, not reinforce, dominant discourses of knowledge and learning.

Creative Power

Mark	Descriptor	Specific Marking Criteria
30-49%	Fail	<p>At my grandmother's memorial, a year after her passing, I spoke in Hebrew. We gathered in a forest near Jerusalem. Pines rose high above us, shedding a carpet of needles on the forest floor. It was a warm day.</p> <p>Hebrew doesn't come fluently to me, although it's my native tongue; I forget some words, get others wrong, hesitate over their taste in my mouth – is that right? Is that a word? – but that day I spoke in Hebrew, about me, about the loneliness I felt when she passed, over the guilt of not seeing her in the months before she died. I said: ממש הבנתי מה זה אבל עד "לא" "שסבתא נפטרה, ופתאום הבנתי</p> <p>My dad told me later I had the heart of a poet. He said, "אני לא תמיד מבין את הדברים שאת כותבת, אולי את מרגישה שאת צריכה להוכיח את עצמך, להראות שאת חכמה או ספרותית; את מסבכת את עצמך, אבל את לא צריכה לעשות את זה."</p> <p>We cried together.</p>

By my own self-imposed criteria, this project has failed. In my initial notes setting out the pedagogical process, I wrote: "I aspire to restrict myself with tense – using only the second person... some play with repetition? When returning to text and reviewing it, (DEVELOP MORE EFFECTIVE SET OF QUESTIONS) [to evaluate]". While using a framework of formal and technical

prompts and evaluating early drafts to develop a piece of writing can be useful, it's telling that this initial scheme of work, which forms an elementary rubric, was restrictive rather than facilitative. It asserted an aspiration – a goal towards which to strive – rather than encouraging experimentation with technique to explore how it might build or serve meaning. It emphasised the importance of a standard by which to evaluate creative writing and demanded that this standard be effective without specifying the end this evaluation serves. Rather than focusing on how learning might happen, these elements of the rubric centred the necessity that something be produced as a result of learning and what this product might look like.

The struggle against conforming to both the arbitrary standards I had imposed on myself and to what I understood to be 'good' writing, done in the right way, plagued me throughout this project. After a free writing session, I wrote: "I was trying to write and all I could think was that this wasn't poetry". On another occasion, I wrote: "Do more research on nonsense strategies". Indeed, at the start of the project I found myself guided not by an exploration of the meaning of certain experiences or ideas and how emergent techniques might facilitate their expression, but by a mastery of technique and how it might impose meaning on that experience or idea.

Even as my freewriting exercises flowed instinctively in one direction, my reflections insisted I should take another: "I found that eventually I wasn't sticking so much to the second person... the blurring of the lines between the 'you's would work well to reflect the dispensing model of knowledge". Present in these early reflections was an awareness that the work would eventually be read and, crucially, assessed; an urge to write that isn't purely creative but also meant to meet the marking rubric's demands with a neat integration of creative writing and pedagogical theory, a pre-made point-scoring paragraph for this essay. This approach to writing aligns, to an extent, with what Gregory Light (2002, p.270) terms the 'narrating conception' of creative writing, described as "the ability to begin integrating reader and readership forms... seen as... a way of becoming... more able to relate one's work to potential readers". What is unaccounted for in this conception of creative writing, however, is the element of

assessment, in which the assumed reader possesses and is able to yield a position of power to make a value judgment on one's creative work, and which translates directly into a higher mark. Such an incentive can be tempting, but it is ultimately damaging. As Kohn (2006, p.14) writes:

“Too much attention to the quality of one's performance [against a rubric] is associated with more superficial thinking... less perseverance in the face of failure, and a tendency to attribute the outcome to innate ability... thought to be beyond one's control”.

For years, my creative writing work had been evaluated, subjected to the interpretation and artistic sensibilities of others, and boiled down to a final mark – reinforcing the notion that what I had written was only worthy inasmuch as it met an acceptable level of academic success. It took a concerted effort and continuous reflection to recognize where a commitment that I had made to myself – write nonsense, use only the second person, try blackout poetry – was not serving my writing or learning process, but my predetermined notion of what might help me achieve a better mark. A key element of this process was focusing on developing autonomy over not only my experiences and ideas and the meaning I found within them, but also over my writing and (un)learning process.

*Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

70-79%	Distinction	<p>I've seen my family twice a year since I turned nineteen, flying to Israel on my own and staying for a couple of weeks at a time. One such time I took it upon myself to write seven poems documenting the simmering presence of the occupation of Palestine in everyday Israeli life. Such was my duty, as an Israeli, as a poet, as a person seeking justice, to bear witness. I saw hatred everywhere; I cried every night; I fought with my family, who were not sympathetic enough by my measure. "Good," my tutor told me when I showed her what I'd written. "Though I feel you can delve a bit deeper."</p> <p>Two years later, I'd spend three months living with Palestinians in the occupied West Bank. I didn't write a word. How could I? What right did I have to profit – through praise, through self-congratulation – off the brutality I saw?</p>
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The problematic nature of the creative writing workshop – commonly modelled after the Iowa Writer's Workshop, in which a writer's work is critiqued by her peers with little opportunity for discussion or input – has been the focus of other researchers of creative writing pedagogy. In what she describes as a 'fault-finding model', Kearns (2009, pp.792 – 795) observes that



“discussion [in creative writing workshops] focuses (sometimes exclusively) on purported ‘flaws’ in the work”, adding that

There is no expectation that [the critic] will articulate her own aesthetic preferences; nor is it considered that the author may have intentionally created an effect that the critiquer sees as a flaw

This can not only render the workshop space frustrating and unhelpful to the writer, but actively perpetuate parochial and oppressive understandings of what is considered ‘good’ writing and silence marginalized writers. For me, it ingrained the expectation of having a reader to which I must cater and with whose unnamed, assumed aesthetic sensibilities I must fall in line, so that by the end of my undergraduate degree the material I wrote was influenced to a large extent by the anticipation of being critiqued by my teacher and my peers alike. To be ‘defensive’ of a piece of writing was seen as lacking in decorum, so I circumvented critique by labouring over a word or a sentence at a time to ensure I wouldn’t write anything that may be perceived as a flaw – anything ‘incorrect’.

I sought to shed this pervasive inner critic and reclaim autonomy over my work by engaging in consistent preliminary freewriting, inspired by Elbow (1998, p.58) who encourages writers to “make the process of writing into atomic fission, setting off a chain reaction, putting things into a pot to percolate, getting words to take on a life of their own.” Fifteen minutes of freewriting every morning helped me set a focus for the day – an idea, memory or experience I was interested in exploring – while recognizing that this focus was entirely fluid and subject to change. It was, on its own merit, and exercise in letting go of what I planned to write or what I thought I ‘should’ write, which was often influenced by considerations of what was ‘literary’, what would best serve the subject matter, and what might constitute an impressive technical feat. This opened up space for exploration in subsequent writing, often conducted some time after preliminary freewriting to allow for distance from the ideas that initially emerged. My work was no longer flawed because it didn’t go to plan or conform to a pre-determined and pre-articulated aesthetic sensibility – instead I allowed myself to follow the

threads of thought and expression that interested me and, crucially, which felt true to my experiences and feelings. I could experiment and take risks with language, composition, and structure to uncover exactly what I felt to be 'good' writing, and what I found satisfying, engaging, and enjoyable to create, even if it diverged from the ideas I had initially conceived. I could find meaning in my writing that had not been there before and allow it to evolve. All of this was acceptable because my preliminary freewriting would go unread both by an assumed reader and, often, myself - the binding expectation of any sort of audience were no longer present. I was beginning to unattach myself from the notion that everything I wrote needed to be complete in its first iteration and that it all needed to be some nebulous definition of 'good'.

### Once Upon a Time Your Grandpa Was Nearing Death

You wait for a phone call and your phone rings.

Can you explain what the phone symbolises?

You smile.

Your stream of consciousness doesn't quite explain what's happening.

You are feeling a lot of emotions. It's perhaps useful to narrow them down a little.

Where are they and when? What time? Where are you in the world?

Do you know what death is? Do you know where death lurks?

Slime and blood and guts how about euthanasia

Your language here is a little derivative

Actually I think you describe these emotions very vividly

You should read Ernest Hemingway

You clarify things

You flip the fucking table and everyone claps for you

You don't owe these people shit

Thank you thanks everyone

You put pen to paper no finger to keyboard

You don't think

## *Creative Power*

Can you explain that line break? What does it add to your piece?

And who is this Saba?

You fly home for the funeral

You don't cry

You should read Sylvia Plath

You are hoping to get a good mark for this one

Following preliminary freewriting, I then began creating my work. At the genesis of a piece, this session would be focused on expressing a feeling or recounting a memory or a problem related to my education through freewriting to allow meaning to emerge. These sessions would be led by instinct, going on for as long as was useful and stopping in the early stages when I found myself straining to write more and, later on in the process, when nothing more came. This was an exercise in both compassion and trust – it would reduce the pressure I had learned to put on myself to write ‘enough’ in terms of both quantity and quality and it would minimise the guilt that came with not meeting these expectations. It also reassured me that the words I had put down on the page came from a real desire to write and not a desire to meet a word count or to be allowed to deem myself productive enough for the day, feeding into the sense of ownership I began to feel over my writing process. This approach was not without its challenges, especially in the early stages of the process, aligned as my writing was with the ‘narrating’ conception of writing and the ever-present awareness of external assessment. Gradually, however, I began to recognise the impulse to measure my work in terms of productivity and had started casting it aside. As the process progressed, I came to trust my instinct and recognise the writing I produced in early iterations of a piece on its own merit, with a shift in conceptual alignment from ‘narrating’ towards ‘releasing’, “describe[ing] student-writers who... view their own writing as a fully personal, private ‘creation’... the student-writer ‘dissents’ from the prevailing readership ‘forms’ and simple

‘releases’ his/her material in personal forms”. (Light, 2002, p.268)

It was through a cycle of creating, pausing, and reflecting with instinct and honesty that my pieces were able to evolve, not through an outcome-oriented approach and unwavering discipline.

A crucial part of this evolution came from experimentation with modes of writing and creating. I was both rewriting pieces to help meaning come into focus and reworking what I had already written to discover and create new meanings still. I took an improvisational approach to the learning and writing process; instead of applying a uniform approach, I looked for lines of flight I could take from existing material and from which new connections could emerge. Wallin (2010, p.89) writes that

“Akin to the computer code, an active approach to the curriculum-as-plan might similarly be expressed via the concept of hacking [computer games]... hacking might become the positive practise of transformation situated immanently”.

Similarly, repurposing existing letters, words, and sentences from earlier in the learning process into new formulations would deterritorialise not only the aspects of my education that I sought to explore but also my own conceptions of these aspects and the meaning I had assigned to the words I had already written.

Rearranging work I had already written was a particularly useful tool to tease out new meanings, especially in pieces where meaning didn’t seem to evolve. After a freewriting session working on a piece based on a potent childhood memory of getting an answer wrong in class, I wrote: “What even is the point of asking students questions with a black or white answer? What does it do other than help students feel either smart or stupid?... I want to interrogate what is stupid, what is considered stupid.” I was determined to explore the way students are stratified into roles through the arbitration of truth and the penalisation of imagination, mediated by the power differential inherent in classroom settings. With this predetermined meaning in mind, repeated attempts to rewrite

the piece failed at bringing about a meaningful evolution. I all but gave up on the piece creatively, even considering putting the unfinished piece into this essay as it was: "I think it's a worthwhile addition to the project as a whole – the way that the education system still has its shackles on me." Through an active process of reordering, however – cutting up each section of the piece and laying it out on my living room floor – I was able to consider these sections in isolation and found that they were conversing with each other. Rather than articulating a problem, as I was so set on doing, I found a solution: an imagining of a classroom in which 'incorrect' answers did not constitute stupidity, but imagination and dialogue.

### Big Yellow Circle

QUESTION: how many hours a day does the sun shine?

INCORRECT ANSWERS:

1. Twelve (twenty-four hours in a day, which is made of one day and one night; twenty four divided by two equals twelve)
14. Zero (in five billion years when the sun explodes)
45. It's different for everyone I guess because some people's time just goes way quicker, like old people for instance
39. I play board games with my therapist every Thursday morning
37. I learned how to play Chopstix on the piano today
16. What is the sun?
73. The sun isn't real, is it?
8. How do you know? Have you been on the sun?
23. In my home planet, there is no sun, just a big rectangle – a timer counting down the minutes until I have to go to bed
4. Three hundred and seventy six (on days in which every hour is fifty thousand minutes long and every minute is a bazillion seconds long)
2. Twelve (on one day in the autumn and one day in the spring, when day and night are equally as long as each other, although ever then they're not perfectly equal as the sun is a disc)
7. Why do we draw the sun like a big yellow circle with sunglasses in the corner of the page if the sun is a disc?
12. Why does it matter?

13. Will the sun explode?
9. No
11. Why?
18. Just a few minutes less than it normally would (on days when there is a lunar eclipse)
17. And the moon? What about the moon?
5. Blue (on days that aren't really made of time or sunshine)
20. The sun has never shone; instead it burns
46. Purple and orange and pink (sunset)
10. Sometimes I read books under my desk
31. I can fill up a notebook with stories in one day and thirty three seconds
15. If I say the wrong answer, will the blood rush to my cheeks? Will I refuse to put my hand up for at least until the end of the day?
6. One (for people who live in prisons, and are only allowed out of their cell for one hour a day)
59. My dad says at this rate we might have to leave the country, this is just no place to raise children he says
44. I felt an earthquake just now, did you feel it?
- 19.
3. Twenty four (the sun does not stop shining)

Integral to experimentation with modes of writing and creating was an element of play, particularly as I sought to deterritorialise processes of learning not aiming to promote curiosity, agency, or enjoyment but instead primarily to deliver a rigidly defined set of outcomes. Forms of gamification – that is, “the use of game design elements in non-game contexts” (Deterding, et al., 2011, p.3) – are common in the practice of teaching creative writing. Collaborative story chains, for instance, where students write a line or paragraph each and pass the paper along with only the previous section on show to create a short story, reproduce elements of games like Broken Telephone and Pass the Parcel and are employed from the lowest levels of education to the highest. Crucially, however, such writing games are often mediated by the context of the classroom, where they are determined and set by the teacher towards the goal of making a learning activity

more enjoyable. Fun is not the primary objective, nor is the subversion or transformation of knowledge – more often it is the development and demonstration of understanding of, for instance, plot or narrative structure, which students are later expected to exhibit and be assessed upon. Woodcock and Johnson's (2018, p.543) distinction between 'gamification-from-above' and 'gamification-from-below' in the context of work equally applies to gamification as an educational strategy: "Gamification-from-above is the imposition of systems of regulation, surveillance and standardization upon aspects of everyday life, through forms of interaction and feedback drawn from games (*ludus*) but severed from their original playful (*paidia*) contexts. By contrast, gamification-from-below represents a true gamification of everyday life through the subversion, corruption and mockery-making of activities considered 'serious'."

Beyond the tactile, puzzle-like activity of rearranging and reordering pieces in progress, it was the process of vacating words and forms of meaning that brought me the greatest sense of play. I took the term 'gifted and talented', which exists as its own kind of trophy for winning games of 'behaviour' and 'achievement' and broke it down into its individual components – that is, nothing but the letters that make it up. One session was focused on creating a list of all the words I could find within the letters; in another, I recorded myself reading random strings of these words into my phone. These activities were not writerly, yet they proved both creative (in the most literal sense of the word) and fun: exciting, slightly embarrassing, funny. They initiated a powerful transformation of what I could imagine the writing process to be, especially as I had, for a long time, considered writing to be a profoundly serious endeavour.

Perhaps the most apt expression of 'serious' writing for me has been formal poetry – particularly the Shakespearean sonnet, rooted and consecrated as it is in the literary canon, which is upheld by creative writing workshops as they "affirm the authority of literary 'masters'... [therefore] imparting an implicit rubric for the 'right' way to write" (Chavez, 2021, p.6). In a later session, I assembled a sonnet from the list of words

I had previously created, adhering to the form's conventions and replicating the tone and pomp of traditional sonnets while paying little attention to the poem's substance. The act of creating, the process itself, was the game, while poetic conventions acted as a set of 'rules' as opposed to a utilisation of form in the service of meaning – in other words, it was the “the transformation of something which is not a game into a game, fundamentally altering the nature of the activity in question, not merely the manner in which the same activity is performed”. This experiment with gamification-from-below allowed me to hollow out the term 'gifted and talented' and (literally) dismantle it and its ugly power to assign inherent intelligence to others. I could use its parts to speak back to long-held conceptions of what constitutes 'good' writing in the literary canon and to relieve it of its reverence, instead finding joy in the act and process of creating. It also further deterritorialised the act of writing itself, and my attachment to writing in the service of meaning. Interestingly, though I was initially fairly invested in making this a nonsense project, my freewriting process consistently leant itself to the uncovering and rediscovering of meaning. It was only through this sort of gamification that I managed to create a piece entirely unguided by meaning – whatever meaning may be extracted from it would be immaterial.

### Gifted and Talented

Attend a legend, feigned agenda, fate!  
In nettled lag I lift an ale and eat.  
An agile deed: a lentil, fig, a date,  
Detain a fattened flea and feint a feat.  
In glee and din I get a glad intent:  
A! Algae, gilded teal and tinted lead –  
A deafened tit? A gifted lad? 'Til leant  
In flattened, latent gant and fattened, fed,  
I feel a fatal net in detail tie  
An eaten tangle 'til I lift and fail –  
And in deflated gait, I die. Nae, I  
Lead a life – deficit, tainted tale!



I lie, defiled, a talent fit and lean,  
I break the rules, commit the final sin.

Reflection after every writing session was a key part of my process. I would practice an active form of disengagement for thirty minutes to an hour – taking a bath, dancing, cooking or listening to music – before returning to reflect on the material I had written for as long as felt useful. These reflections normally focused on how I felt in the process of writing: what excited, surprised, or frustrated me. They offered the space to unpack and examine these feelings and where they came from, which proved valuable in several ways both to the evolution of a piece and to my learning process. The first of these was creating a platform for conversation between my Self and my inner critic, channelling Schwartz’s model of Internal Family Systems (IFS) Therapy. Particularly after sessions in which I felt frustrated with what I’d written or as if I’d let myself down in some way, allowing this part of myself to speak helped me to recognise my inner critic as seeking to protect me from failure, and to be more compassionate with the part of myself that feared it. As Schwartz (2013, p.806) explains,

“The emphasis is not on trying to change or replace irrational cognitions, but on noticing them and then acting in ways that the observing self considers more adaptive or functional”. Embracing this part of myself facilitated a redefinition of ‘failure’ and ‘success’, rather than an insistence on disregarding success altogether.

This redefinition process precipitated a real shift in my conception of the writing process in that it ceased to be guided by how it might be regarded by peers and measure against a rubric and instead refocused on what I’d find enjoyable, fulfilling, and meaningful to write. As a result, I was able to think of the writing process not as a method to improve my material, but rather to evolve it. Aligning with Kearns’ (2009, p.801) alternative to the traditional creative writing workshop, reflection served a true self-pedagogy which “rather than ‘critique’ or ‘give feedback’” promoted “listen[ing], learn[ing], convers[ation], encourage[ment]”. I

had the space to reflect on whether I actually liked what I wrote, name and explore meanings that emerged in the process of writing and think about potential strategies I could employ in later writing sessions, all while recognising that, just like ideas that emerged in preliminary freewriting sessions, these were not commitments but possibilities. After a writing session later on in the process that took a surprising turn, for instance, I reflected that “this piece will probably be infinitely more true to myself if I follow this thread rather than mould it to ‘interesting’ but emotionally divested ideas”.

Emerging from this honest, instinctual discussion was an opportunity to use reflection as a tool for self-evaluation, which engages in constant conversation with newly discovered and personally defined measures of success. About the practice of ungrading – in which a teacher relies on a variety of strategies to replace numerical or letter-grade assessment with more reflective and engaged forms of assessment and to “create a safe space for students to ask critical questions about grades, about how school works, and about their own learning” (Stommel, 2021) – Stommel (2018) writes that “What students write to me in self-reflections and self-evaluations is profoundly different from the kinds of interactions we would have in a purely transactional system. [Self-evaluations] become a space of dialogue... about their learning and about how learning happens”. Indeed, self-reflections have been instrumental in helping me delineate instances of writing that have served my overall objective – that is, to unlearn processes of writing and learning that have restricted my creativity and confidence – and in considering what conditions and strategies enabled this to happen. Most importantly, this space allowed me to assert my success on my own terms and to articulate and reclaim what Stommel (2021) calls “the idiosyncratic, subjective, emotional character of learning” in a way a final mark determined by a rubric never could.

Dear marker, the irony inherent to this essay is not lost on me. Writing it has, frankly, cheapened the process. I’ll receive a mark for this work, maybe a good one, maybe not; against my better instinct, my heart will lift or drop,

Creative Power

accustomed as it is to deriving its worth from the approval of others. Perhaps the only thing I've learned completely is that the education system has integrated itself into my thoughts and feelings in ways I'm only just beginning to recognise, that I still have a lot to unlearn and learn again. But through this process I have begun to consider how I could conceive of an education that doesn't maintain the institutions that taught me, and how subverting and then moving beyond them might give rise to a learning process grounded in curiosity, agency, and joy. When I write, it will be out of a genuine desire to create; it will be a playful, trusting, and compassionate act of exploration and discovery – and it will be for my fulfilment and on my own terms.

1-9%	Very bad fail	<p>oats milk chia seeds</p> <p>i don't know why i think this but i just want to find someone to swim with</p> <p>what's the deal with the guy carrying helium balloons on the tube for an engagement party dressed in sporty casual? is he getting married? is someone else? what kind of degradation comes with carrying helium balloons on a crowded train?</p> <p>The way Matt laughed out loud in the cinema was wonderful. So joyful, so shameless</p> <p>we went hunting for the good enough children's library</p>
0%	Non submission	I didn't write about standing on a rock in Scotland and watching

	or plagiarised	a waterfall. I didn't write about watching the water hit one small outcropping of rock. I didn't write about the waterfall as it splintered into streams and drops, shattering outwards, falling down. I didn't write about wondering whether the water ever splintered in exactly the same way twice, in all the hundreds of thousands of years it had been falling. I didn't write but I watched, for thirty minutes, and wondered.
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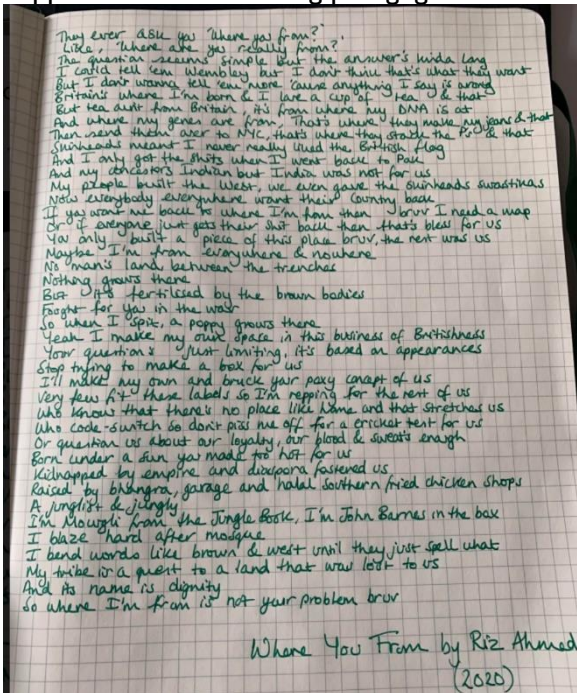
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- Speaking Back to Myself: Orienting and Healing Through

# SPEAKING BACK TO MYSELF: SYEDA SALMAH

*Orienting and Healing Through Creative Writing*

Riz Ahmed a prominent British rapper recently released his album titled 'The Long Goodbye' (2020) followed by a short film which won an award at the Oscars. I have followed this man for over a decade, charting his success with my chest full of pride fit to burst because for once, someone was successfully telling the world what we, the diaspora, are feeling. It is important to note that his success came off the back of many other British South Asians' hard work. However, the energy, the rawness, and sheer vehemence of his words that he 'spits' pumped through me in a way that I have never known before. I attach the words to his poem which features in the short film to predicate this essay and the lens with which I approach creative writing pedagogies.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDmabQgumI4>  
(Ahmed 2022)

Figure 1: Lyrics to a 'Where you From' taken from Riz Ahmed's album 'The Long Goodbye' (Ahmed 2020)

Riz Ahmed proves to me that through creative writing you can be radical and centre your experience in a way that is not designed to solely entertain the masses. In particular, the phrase 'I blaze hard after mosque' (Ahmed 2020) holds an amusing and painful truth within it that made my rib cages ache with its accuracy. This line highlights how hard it is to be a British-Bangladeshi-Muslim-Female. Growing up, I carried the fear of God, a teenage angst for rebellion, the craving to smoke and disappear, the desire to impress the boys around me, the burden of justifying my parents' sacrifices, the absence of my motherland, the need to stay within a pack – it felt endless. But what joy to find that there were people out there who also dealt with these many million fragmented parts within themselves all battling and vying for a place?

The idea of these parts fighting for a place in my soul is very much a personal issue which this essay looks at directly. This sense of many elements struggling within your mind was captured by DuBois when he framed the term 'Double Consciousness' (2016). DuBois describes double consciousness as follows:

'a world which yields him no true self-consciousness but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a particular sensation this double consciousness this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness; two souls; two thoughts' (DuBois 2016)

In Marc Black's article 'Fanon and DuBoisian Double Consciousness' (2007) he explains that African Americans are forced to view themselves from and as the negative perspectives of the outside society.

‘Having two antagonistic identities means that a lot of time and energy is spent negotiating and enduring the conflicts between who one is as a person and how one struggles to live with the misrepresentations of the outside world’ (Black 2007)

Dubois in his seminal text ‘The Souls of Black Folk’ also writes that African Americans carry ‘this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self’ (2016). It seems then, that this feeling of a split self has existed for a long time. My struggle is not unique which is reassuring. I am reminded of my readings of Frantz Fanon’s ‘The Wretched of the Earth’ (2001) who takes the double consciousness concept further and expounds that if any of us have been colonised to a certain degree then we also suffer from double consciousness. Fanon writes that we are ‘stumbling over the need to assume two nationalities .....one thought and striving is self-defined while the other is imposed from the outside, white, world’ (2001). These concepts appeal to me; I also absorb and internalize how others see me from the outside. I am wary and my family’s place in Britain feels heightened. Yet, at the same time, I am hardly seen beyond my skin colour. Black notes that there are ‘struggles with contradictions between these two warring ideals while whites ...do not even have to realize that they are seen by and as racial others. This is the white supremacy of unilateral double consciousness’(2007). Often, I am envious because I will never be able to ignore that others form their impression of me based on my heritage. I tuck and curl up the knowledge that others see me as ‘different’ inside of me, but it piles up high like sand dunes. This essay draws out the repressed intergenerational trauma that I carry from being part of an immigrant family. Why do I hide it? The anger is exhausting, the explaining is frustrating, and the lash back is draining. As Ahmed wryly alludes to, many people want to be involved in all the vibrant clothes and the exotic food yet become defensive when you reveal your true feelings about displacement.

I believe, as Fanon does, that you must observe and continue evaluating your colonised point of view from a different



vantage point- you need to see your colonized self through your indigenous perspective. For too long I have done it the other way round, why not now lift the parts I have hidden and give them a platform now? In this essay I will use my personal vantage as a starting point to draw out conversations with my heart and mind to show how creative writing pedagogies can help open a dialogue with your 'Self'.

I would also like to situate this essay on a wider scale and place it within a contemporary setting. Many of the troubles that Ahmed shares in his album was sparked by an age-old conversation about immigration in Britain. Recently, the government's controversial Nationality and Borders bill that deliberately targets refugees has been described as one of the most brutal legislations to go through (Taylor 2022). It is not new to us, the feeling that we are being used as a scapegoat to afford the current Conservative Party's breaches against human rights. We saw it happen when Shamima Begum's citizenship was revoked, with the cunning deportation deal with Rwanda and as always refugees are under attack. 'Soon it will be you and I that they target' is the rhetoric we share in huddled circles. Whilst people like my aunts and uncles are being described as greedy lepers, Ukrainians are being ushered in with open arms which raises more than just an eyebrow. We cannot help but query the sinister racial undertones of such behaviour.

During the pandemic I lost the last of my grandparents and I felt like this burning red thread that had kept me rooted to my true origins had been cut clean and left me floating utterly unmoored. This led me to wonder about how I came to be British and my parents' origin story as it were. As a young teenager, I carried a lot of shame about being the child of an immigrant. Now that I am older, I realise that this shame was created by outside narratives and perspectives – the very angle that Fanon warns us about as mentioned earlier.

Neema Begum shares the same frustration with me in her article 'Decolonising the Curriculum' (2019) and decries that

often 'knowledge is produced, propagated and perpetuated through white, western perspectives.' Begum articulates that the narratives about immigrants in political discourses is something that makes us doubt our (the diaspora) sense of belonging and it prohibits us from thriving in society (2019). Often the stories of immigrants exist in extreme bubbles, they are either media storms that whip up racist froth or on the other end of the spectrum where you hear about the tales of immigrants overcoming obstacles and forever being 'resilient' as if destined for a lifetime of suffering. Begum argues that when thinking about decolonisation particularly in the academic world it 'goes beyond shoe-horning POC onto reading lists but decolonising the academy itself so social scientists not only question but challenge structural racisms and sexism rather than simply preaching the neo-liberal virtues of 'resilience' and 'hard work' (2019).

Therefore, this essay draws out the internal disquiet that lives within me through pedagogical strategies to find a space where I feel safe to bare my feelings about my identity and heritage in an external state. I am tired of suppressing this part of me and wish to conceptualise my sense of belonging on an intellectual level. There is a requirement for greater representation in a way that doesn't just become media fodder but actually acknowledges and challenges the idea that Begum raises:

'White middle class forms of capital -cultural knowledge and skills- are disproportionately valued over others. These forms of capital not only ignore resilience POC have accrued in navigating obstacles to achieve a space within academia, but they also deliberately undervalue the sorts of knowledge and critical reflexivity academics within marginal spaces can bring to the table.' (2019)

If we want to move forward and away from extreme narratives of people like my parents then as Begum suggests we need to have 'meaningful recognition of alternative perspectives embedded in analysis of power relation including those of race class and gender'(2019) . It is my belief that

creative writing can provide the space for such alternative perspectives.

Teaching creative writing means that I can both politicise myself as well as heal and orient my diasporic position. I can map out a river that flows through my personal experiences whilst being consciously aware of how creative writing can be used to promote a unique reality that can co-exist amongst others. By consciously partaking in creative writing pedagogies with the intention to decolonise a narrative, I believe I will find a sense of pride in it. I am teaching myself to engage with pedagogies that help me to take apart my shrouded thoughts about my parents' journey and their first experiences here, then trying and put them back together again.

My methodology will include experimenting with pedagogies that help me reimagine a space that is familiar – the story of my parents' journey to the UK, and to view them in a strange and new way within a safe space. I consider this an internal revolution because I subconsciously carry these presumptions about their experiences that has been infected by external forces such as media reports. I am using creative writing to give me the autonomy and learning to re-position myself from a teacher (existing knowledge) to learner (new knowledge).

## Investigating Creative Writing & its value

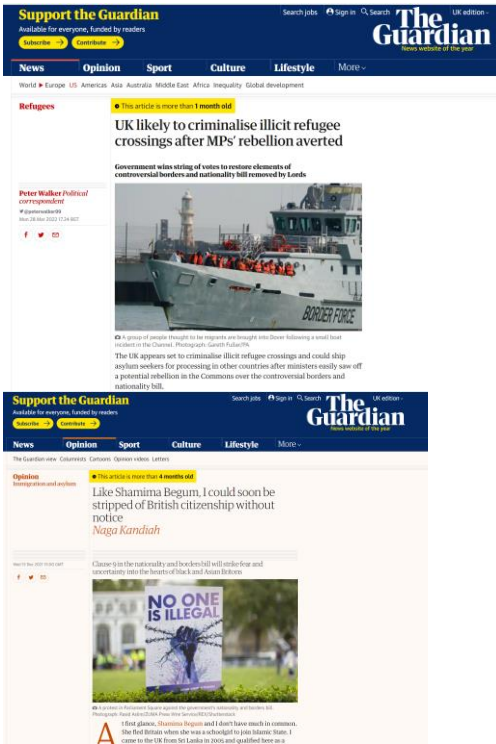


Figure 2: Screenshot of articles taken from *The Guardian* discussing the Nationality and Borders Bill (Walker 2022) and Shamima Begum's citizenship (Kandiah 2021)

## DIAGRARTING

I begin with Gilbert's method of diagrarting taken from 'Diagrarting: Theorising and practising new ways of writing' (2022) to generate ideas regarding immigration. I search within myself to see what is already there- my assumptions about immigrants and to question what I think I know. This is a particularly appealing strategy because as Gilbert writes 'the point of this new form is to give permission to express yourself' (2022). This is a low stakes activity, and it yields a free-flowing energy without fear of being judged, I can close my eyes and let the pen flow and open the box inside. There is a suspicion that I carry the same judgemental views about

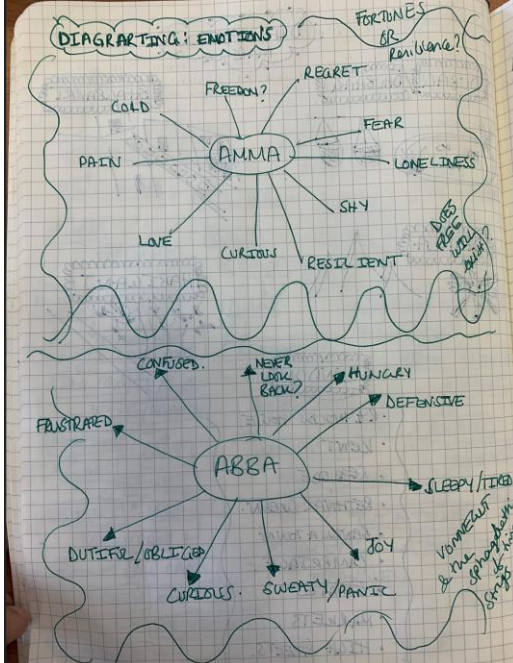
my parents and grandparents. I have compartmentalised my thoughts and reactions in relation to racist narratives for so long that it feels cloudy but this is normal and Gilbert notes that the benefit of diagraphing is 'from a Deleuzian-Guattarian perspective ...a concept which opens a creative space where its creator can productively come to terms with this jostling of concepts and affects' (2022).

Old photos of my parents when they are married, at the airport and in Bangladesh provide a starting point for me to respond. Cross in her 'Writing Lifestories' describes, in her own experience of teaching students at university, a similar strategy where she asks her students to capture memories and access their funds of knowledge in writing by 'seeing and experience the world as those came before them may have seen it and felt to understand their ancestors hopes dreams and fears' (2020). By using diagraphing I can demonstrate to myself that I can 'capture the interior life of a culture from whence they came'(Cross 2020). This need to engage with my inner self and draw out what I think know about my heritage is further supported by the views of Diedre Osborne in her article 'From Institutional Exclusion to Institutionalisation (2019) who is concerned about heritage acquisition and how it is formed. She writes that it is crucial for us diaspora folk to engage with the foreigner that lives in us as well as the one who wants to belong because:

'reading the flow of another person's thoughts as created by the literary writer requires articulating these thoughts through one's own inner voice....defamiliarizing and revelatory process, it can unlock how to perceive something in a particular socio-cultural context'. (Osborne 2019)


She states that in order to promote diverse perspectives in 'Britishness' then you need to be 'broadening experiences of literary legacies in linking informal and formal learning'(Osborne 2019). Diagraphing draws out within me this space to be informal and jot down the images and thoughts that float in my mind. I would argue that it this is a positive thing because it moves toward what Osborne claims as 'de-

canonical consciousness'(2019) where I acknowledge that marginalized perspectives are worth celebrating. It is also what Gilbert terms as 'reification' (2022) in that my etchings help turn abstract emotions about racist narratives into more substantial and concrete things that are visual and create a new way for me to look at old emotions. What struck me during this process was the way in which my ideas were able to pour out but then how I had to go back and find the 'secret strings'(Gilbert 2022) that connected these ideas especially in the diagram with the flow chart. This is part of the process where you are encouraged to have a dialogue with yourself and help find out what you want to learn about. Reading back on my diagramming pieces meant that I was able to formulate categories that would later help inform my interview questions. This was a rewarding experience because I felt I was creating a new unique language of my own that was special and relevant to me regardless of who was watching or reading it.




## Investigating Creative Writing & its value

**PHOTOS**



Abba is at the airport, wearing a white dhoti, trousers are kicke flared & sombre aviators cover his eyes but you can see his smile. Smart & alluring, abba where are you going dressed up?

Kushi lagch dekhch. Shundhar lagch.  
Ami the amareh non sinni-na.  
Amar zannar ageh.



Anna you are pale, dawa & so slim. Today is your wedding day and there are pink dots on your face. Everyone is watching you. But why do you look so forlorn? What's wrong and I wish I had been there I would have watched you too.

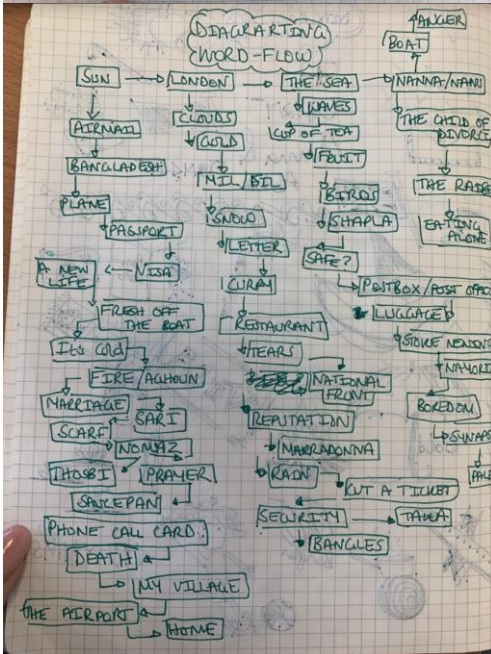


Figure 4: My diagrarting images



## INTERVIEW & DIALOGIC QUESTIONING (INTERVIEWING 'AMMA')

I then produce interview questions using dialogic questioning approach inspired by Fisher's chapter on 'Dialogic Teaching (2011) and particularly focusing on stems that use mitigating language. I am to ask difficult questions, to reach out to my parents and admit what I do not know about their pains and joys of when they first arrived in the UK. There is a shyness in my manner, I feel unprepared and vulnerable, but I know that I ought to face it. The dialogic approach offers an open-endedness where I encourage space for both of us to talk about the experience of being immigrants in both English and in Bangali. Richard Teleky in 'Entering the Silence: Voice, Ethnicity and the Pedagogy of Creative Writing' (2001) shows the power of doing this in two languages when tracking a unique story about Chinese American immigrants in the film 'Obasan'. Commenting on the character Maxine who feels isolated Teleky notes that the character 'needs to learn that both language can co-exist in her as she tries to find a language of her own ...finding a voice moves her toward her consciousness....it is a movement toward valuing her own experience that ends the confusion of silence with self-discovery'(2001) . This was more than just a simple exercise of ask and tell – by applying dialogical questioning stems that encouraged abstract emotions my mother and I found ourselves revealing and opening painful assumptions about each other. Occasionally there was some tension- I expected a specific answer instead she gave me something different in return that didn't fit my version of her.

Kirsten Manley-Casimir in 'Creating Space for Indigenous Storytelling in Courts' (2012) notes when relating the stories of indigenous claimants that judges needed to realize their personal limitations

## Investigating Creative Writing & its value

‘Drawing on the idea of pedagogy of discomfort they might take on the challenged of the need to struggle to be discomforted and unsettled in engaging..... learning to listen involves engaging our whole being ...using silence not to deny but to welcome and recognizes the transformative possibilities of stories we do now want to hear.’(Manley-Casimir 2012)

Fisher says that dialogue cannot simply be a passive cognitive space, it is a process that requires you to create a ‘community of inquiry’ where ‘students value diversity, ask unusual questions and make new connections and represent ideas in different ways’ (2011). Encouraging Amma to ask questions about my diargrating means that I reveal an emotional part of me. Fisher promotes emotional connection as a crucial process of pedagogy because creative writing ‘depends on empathy, the social and emotional intelligence that enables dialogic partners to respond to each other’(2011). Personally, I feel that the power imbalances in my mind can be alleviated when I allow my emotional selves to be involved in my professional (teacher) selves and recognize the pain and relevance of other people’s stories.

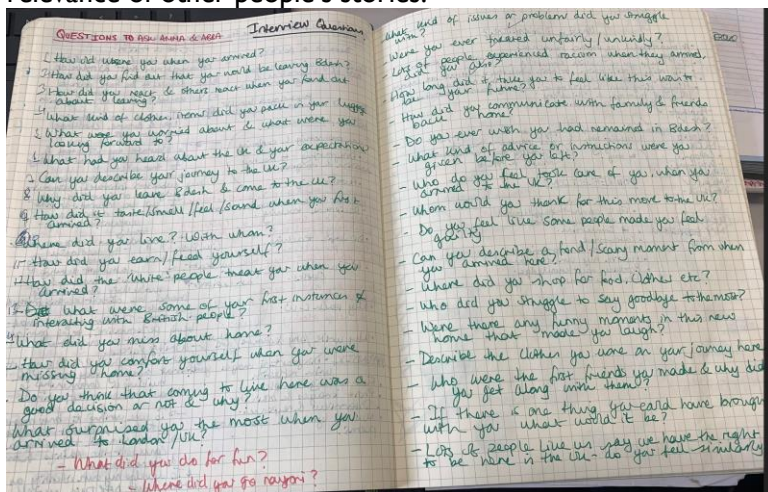
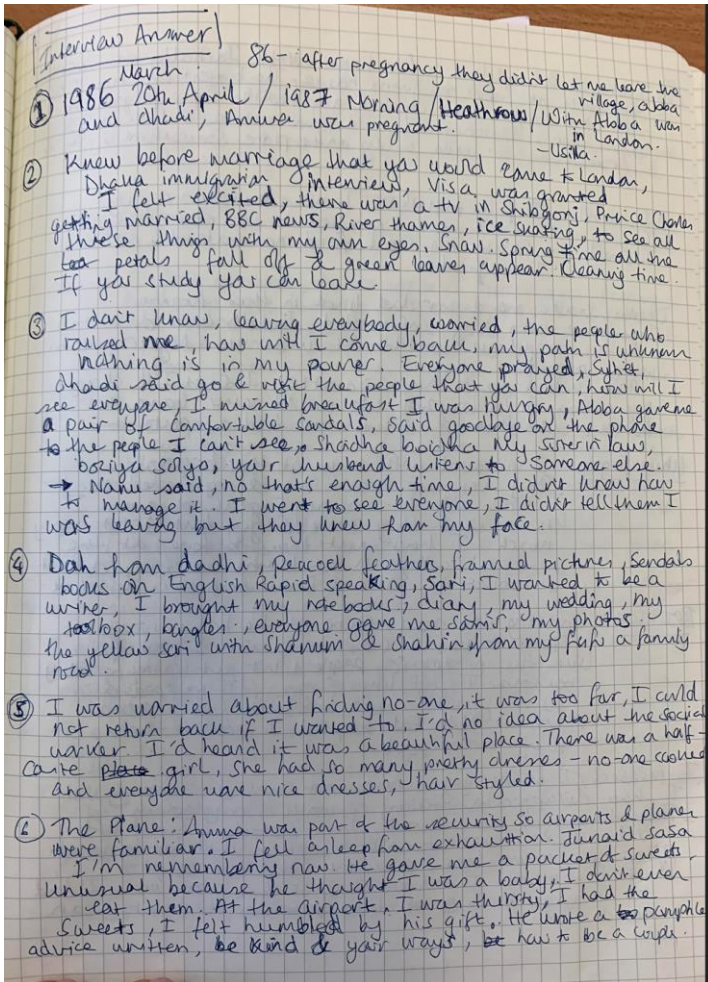


Figure 5: Interview questions for my mother using dialogic stems

## Creative Power



# Investigating Creative Writing & its value

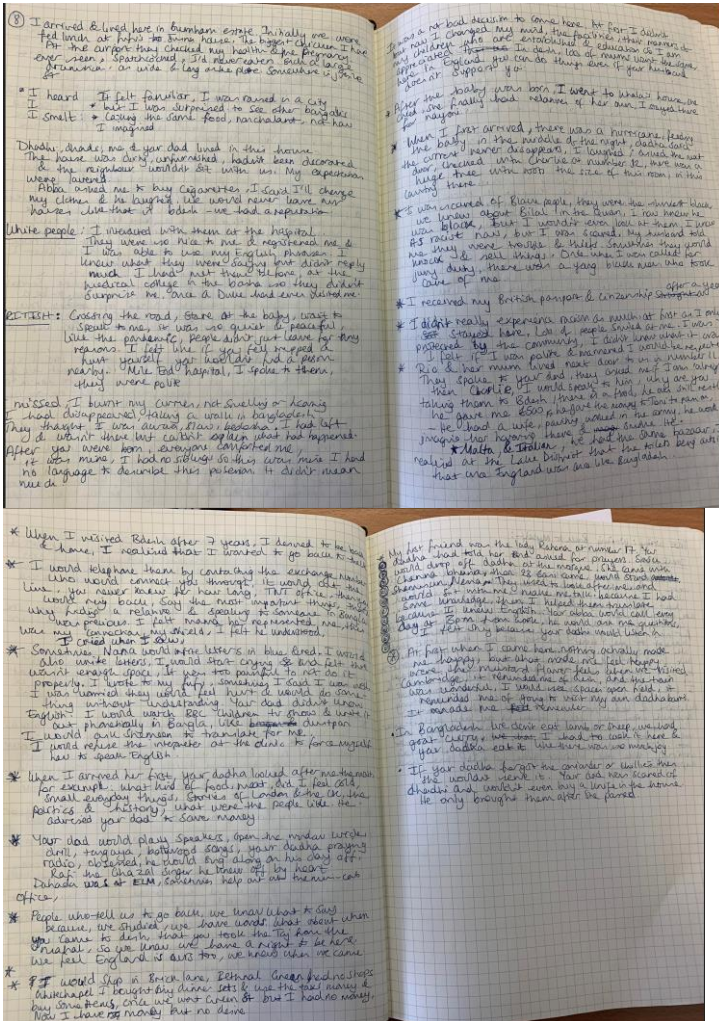


Figure 6: Stories and answers from my mother about her journey and arrival in the UK

## RECIPROCAL TEACHING AND DIAGRAMMING

By communicating and voicing my diagramming journey in return, in the spirit of reciprocity. In Davis and Viorin's article 'Reciprocal Writing as a Creative Technique' (2016) they present

reciprocal writing as an essential technique. When encouraging counsellors to engage with their clients they note that reciprocal teaching is a form of learning that 'reinforces student ownership and helps the student to integrate new knowledge into their existing knowledge' (2016). Becoming an effective teacher means that I need to make emotional space for my parents to talk back to me with permission and model that we can be honest with each other and learn from this process. I am using the silence that we shared between us about immigration to create a conversation that does not exist in mainstream media. Davis and Voirin also link this to narrative therapy which evokes a similar process as what Amma and I did in our collaborative 'Green Street' poem: 'Narrative therapy implies that individuals develop their human experiences as stories..... [to] elicit descriptions of a client's agency in relation to the problem and deconstruct the discourses that support the problem' (2016) suggesting that I can invite my mother to mould and shape what it means to be an immigrant in the UK.

Teleky also pushes for 'teachers of creative writing ...their task is essentially a transformative one: to help students connect to silence as a place for thought and for the tensions that can produce art'(2001). When discussing the diagraphing images, Amma and I speak in both English and Bangali, exchanging confusion at first and sometimes laughter. She is encouraged to correct my misconceptions about racial aggravation and leads me down another path where she tells stories of how it truly felt for her, and she digs through memories of carrying a bag of sweets that her brother-in-law gave her as a goodbye present. It is not easy to recall events that took place 35 years ago and there are some uncomfortable silences where she is startled at what I have produced. I seem to have exaggerated some moments such as the loneliness and completely disregarded others such as the birth of her first child and her experiences at the hospital. I understand why my images might seem hyperbolic to her because in Rosalind Hampton and Ashley DeMartini in 'We Cannot Call Back Colonial Stories' when discussing Canadian

land and nationality issues with indigenous communities warns that 'European colonial ideology is embedded in our narratives....violent histories of domination and exploitation have been replaced with comforting stock stories' (2017). Creating a space for reciprocity means that I can challenge these exaggerated stories that only centre white supremacy stories against people like my mother. Hampton and DeMartini reassures me that by participating together with my mother 'this kind of speaking back is an important pedagogical strategy in generating participant driven analysis'(2017). There is a way to combat these Eurocentric perspectives by 'remembering, listening to, sharing and recording stories has been and remains a crucial means of anti-colonial resistance' and that it becomes my responsibility as an educator to 'vigilantly work against this'(Hampton and DeMartini 2017). As a student I learn that the linear narrative that has infected me is not the only one I need to rely on.

This practice of reciprocity using diagraphing images is valuable in resurfacing my initial reactions to being Bangladeshi and allows me to connect with my heritage with a sort of tenderness and forces me to strip away the protective layer I had built up around it. Osborne when writing about a case study where indigenous students go home and talk about their work, she tells us that it:

'confirms the positive familial consequences which D.Keith Peacock refers to evoking in the Swann Reports of 1984 as 'cultural translation' not just from 'the minority to the majority' but also from one generation to another so that parental generations too are learning' about their children'(2019).

Until now, I was a in relay race passing the baton to versions of myself, but through this reciprocal process I find myself sharing the baton with my mother. It's not clear yet what the baton represents but it is a good start. Reading about the court cases in Vargas, Marambio and Lykke's article 'Decolonising Mourning' (2020) of the indigenous people who wanted to defend themselves using storytelling, she comments on how 'frozen stories can be thawed'(2020) and learns from

Heman'y the indigenous speaker that 'rather than accepting the claim to universality of western epistemologies and ontologies we question and opt instead for pluriversality'(2020). It is this word 'pluriversality' that speaks to me the most when considering how creative pedagogies can generate a process towards decolonising narratives. I cannot control the western solipsistic narratives, but I can help keep mine own and my mother's narrative alive so that there is a kaleidoscope of voices that pushes against voice who want to monopolise and dominate our experiences of being British.

## Investigating Creative Writing & its value

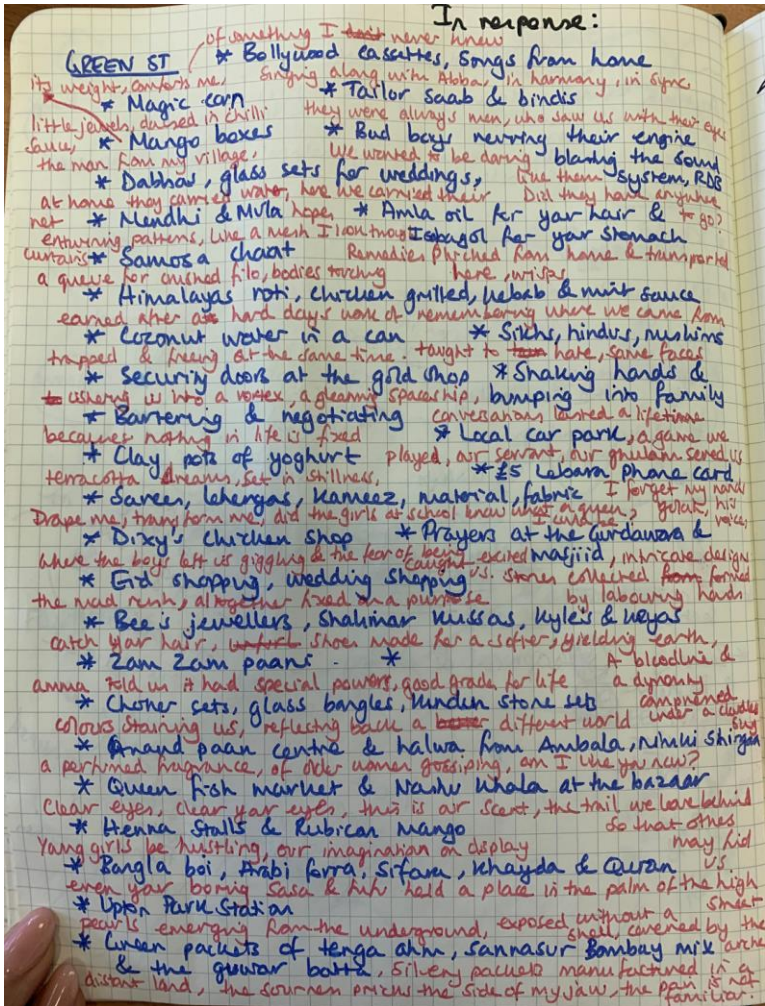


Figure 7: A collaborative poem about 'Green Street'

## INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEM THERAPY

Having generated these imaginary places and quantifying emotions, I need to recuperate and reflect upon the many voices that are talking to me. I return to my inner self and create a dialogue with the parts in myself using Schwartz's 'Internal Family Systems Therapy' (2013) where I create a



dialogic space within my heart and mind. The process is incredibly enlightening and the frustration of how I view my parents as 'weak' flow out of me without realising. I begin thinking about my parents in a very one-dimensional manner but then find myself reaching conclusions that I wasn't aware of, and this is most welcome. Speaking to my 'naïve' version through the lens of a 'wiser Salmah' helps me unpack the burden that I have been carrying.

Shwartz notes that the IFS therapy model sees 'all parts as innately valuable components of a healthy mind ...a fully functioning inner system requires these subminds ...to function well'(2013). It is paramount that I admit these mini voices jostling around and the script I write becomes a liberating experience because 'clients learn that aspects of themselves they have hated or feared actually have been trying to protect them'(Shwartz 2013). Once I allow the naïve, frightened version of me to say what she really wants to express, there is a part of me that becomes compassionate-the older, wiser version. I tell my younger self that instead of carrying burdens, I can teach my mother to speak up and let her have her own voice. This realisation is what Shwartz refers to as

'when those parts are willing to relax and let acceptance of Self shine on the problematic ones those parts will admit they don't like their protective roles and want to change' (2013).

My decolonised/indigenized part is empowered by using dialogic based questions who notices thoughts and tracks the emotions and tells the naïve version it is okay to exist. Using this IFS therapy model as part of creative writing pedagogy shows that multiple voices can co-exist without competition or a need to take the spotlight.

I think it is important to point out that this internal dialogue requires a leap of faith from me where I had to say things out loud that I have never said before which has yielded something painful. One part of me feels possessive about the burden I

have been carrying. However, the 'Self' advises me: let your mum speak and let her tell her story, you do not have to do it for everyone. In Lehmann and Brinkmann's case study in 'I'm the one who has written this: Reciprocity in Writing courses for older adults in Norway' (2019) they identified that environments which encouraged reciprocity worked when 'there was a deeper embrace of vulnerability as a part of the human condition' (2019). This opened the door for reciprocity to emerge and that 'it can be a challenging for the writer-teachers to enter a space when they can meet their own vulnerabilities'(2019). In my script I trust my 'selves' to speak up and externalize thoughts about being a first-child immigrant who must manage her parents' stories. Instead of tucking them away, I use creative writing to let my 'self', see another self without being influenced by a 'white perspective'. Lehman and Brinkmann reassure me that this is a good sign because 'our relationship with others [in this case other versions of me] shape our narrative and this recognition is inherent to understanding of a singular self' (2019). Creative dialogue with myself feels genuine and I feel secure in talking back to myself.

## Creative Power

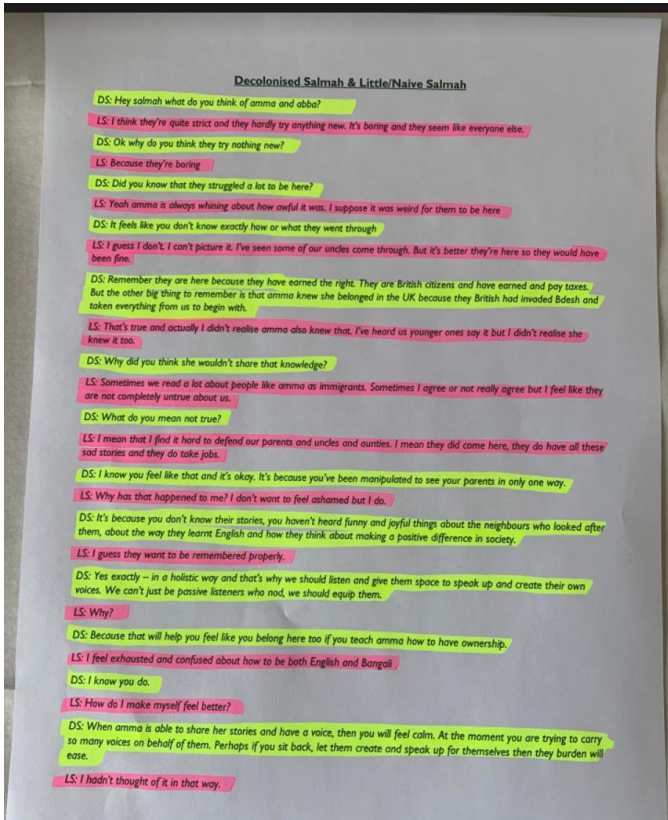


Figure 8: Dialogue with my inner selves

### FREE WRITING

I also experiment with Peter Elbow's strategy of free writing promoted in his book 'Writing Without Teachers' (1998) with the aim of reflecting and establishing my position in relation to these conversations. RD Lang notes in 'The Divided Self' (1969) that we are a collaboration and confusion of different voices. I am looking to see if an authentic self can be revealed or whether the subaltern part of me which seems to be in flux can that be embraced. Elbow who leads in his chapter when talking about the 'teacherless writer' (1998) guides me through this process. I take the topic of immigration and respond to it in hope of releasing a new sense of meaning that

## Investigating Creative Writing & its value

is infused within my words, especially since engaging in dialogue with the 'naïve Salmah'. This free flow, like Gilbert's diagraphing method, is designed to help me find meaning on a deeper level. Elbow values free writing because 'the integration of meanings is at a finer level than you can achieve by conscious planning or arranging' (1998).

Choosing this form of creative writing pedagogy means that my reflections are being sifted through the previous writing tasks and gives me the opportunity to talk about my parents' immigration externally without feeling conspicuous—something that I can't always do. Robert Boice in 'Writing Blocks and Tacit Knowledge' (1993) when talking about 'automaticity' also champions this method: 'it lowers writer's repressive defences and allows greater access to inner experiences .....writers seem less burdened by fears of uncovering disturbing materials' (1993). My free writing reflection proves that the connection I have between my parents and myself is delicate and requires constant renegotiation and I should not take what I know for granted especially when it comes to voicing the immigrant experience. On this journey of creative storytelling, I realize that my funds of knowledge are relevant, and what my parents have to say and what I know about them is already important.

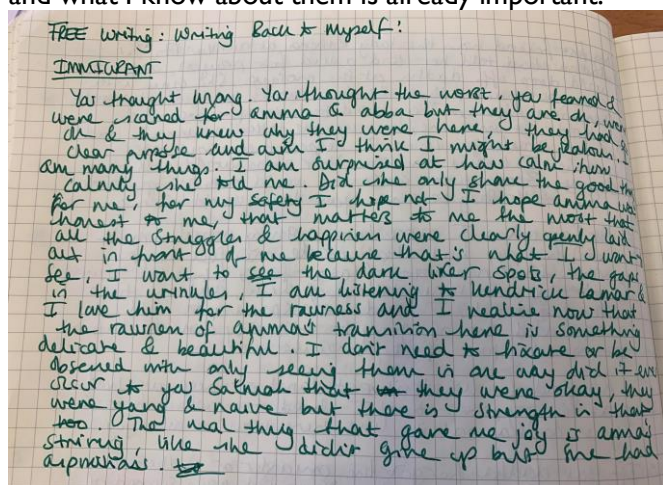


Figure 9: Free writing

### WHY TEACHING CREATIVE WRITING IS IMPORTANT

This entire journey has been designed with the purpose of highlighting how creative writing pedagogies can be used to nurture and draw out the raw versions of my inner self and give me permission to explore what it means to be the daughter of immigrants in a new way. This has proven to be an emotional and fulfilling experience on a personal level in terms of drawing out my 'subminds' and teach myself to take ownership of my multiple voices. On a political scale, I have been able to find ways to use writing to release my difficult feelings about the way immigration is presented in mainstream narratives. Gilbert notes in 'Why Teach Creative Writing?' (2021), that 'a teacher focused upon 'cultural analysis' may well be an activist seeing creative writing as a way to make themselves and other people more politically and socially conscious'(2021). He mentions that teacher classes could have 'a healing' element to them in that their focus is ...to find ways of writing expressively as an outlet for difficult feelings'(Gilbert 2021). Through dialogue, through the reciprocal process of active listening, and by acquiring new knowledge between myself and my mother, I have centred the learner's experience. Gilbert also notes that giving 'creative writers a chance to reflect upon their own identities...thus develop their personalised pedagogies' (2021). For a long time, I have been silent about my feelings towards immigration and by engaging with it directly I have come transform it into something tangible. I acknowledge that it is an inherently painful act but it is also a collective act that works towards healing my psyche.

### CONCLUSION

Unlearning immigrant narratives and choosing to engage with my parents can be achieved through these pedagogies and I can learn to forgive myself for the assumptions I have made about them. Creative writing pedagogies are a way to bring about an internal revolution within me and I am teaching myself to that I can use writing to listen and be compassionate.

Manley-Casimir quotes the theories of John Paul Lederach in her article as someone who coined the term 'moral imagination' (2012). She tells us that it is the 'capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist' (Manley-Casimir 2012). This is an exciting phrase and truly sums up what I feel creative pedagogies can do for us. It can usher in a world that doesn't quite exist yet, a world where plural narrative co-exists and learners' voices are used to help us evolve beyond a singular perspective. In her article she suggests that 'the moral imagination asks judges to imagine that multiple realities and world view might be able to exist simultaneously' (Manley-Casimir 2012). Creative writing is an emancipatory project that is driven by the motivation to free myself from the stronghold of the canon and mainstream media and engage in a way that consciously raises my self-esteem whilst developing a multi-generational sense of belonging in Britain.

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# **TREATING WRITER'S BLOCK RAHWA WOLDU**

## *INTRODUCTION*

When I enrolled on the Creative Writing and Education MA I wanted to invest in my writing under the supervision of experienced lecturers.

I first actively started writing during my undergraduate degree at the age of 19. I mainly wrote free verse poems, which later evolved into extracts of short stories. This was solely done in my spare time; although in my third year I did undertake a module in American Autobiography which allowed me to write on a weekly basis.

Interestingly, I cannot remember writing as a child, although I remember having an interest in reading stories. As a late bloomer to writing it is unsurprising then that I have found myself struggling to call myself a 'writer' despite enjoying writing and having received positive feedback. My primary reason for joining the course, was to help deal with the insecurities I find myself grappling with as an adult writer. One key insecurity I have is the authenticity of my writer voice. Ironically, one of the central themes I deal with in my writing is belonging. As the daughter of Eritrean migrants, born in Saudi Arabia, living in London from the age of 3 it is hard to blend the different perspectives I have. I particularly question my right to tell stories about Eritrean people, and their culture because of my diasporic position.

This particular struggle is not exclusive to me; the writer Marlene Phillip also navigates the difficult space of a layered identity; she is: "Black, African-descended, female, immigrant (or interloper) and Caribbean,"...she writes "on the margins of history" and "in the shadow of empire," forced to function

"against the grain as an unembedded, disappeared poet and writer" (Davis, 2020, p.148).

It was my hope that regularly writing as part of this master's course, alongside receiving frequent feedback would lead me closer to becoming confident in the stories I have to tell and the standpoint from which I am writing them. However, after the first year of my masters, it became clear to me that I had not developed the regular habit of writing (outside of the course), in order to achieve this goal. This was partly due to my hectic schedule as a full-time teacher but also the added pressure of wanting to write well. Interestingly, joining the course had created more pressure because I had somehow given myself a fake deadline to get 'good' at writing, which in turn led me to avoid writing altogether.

The reality is, when it comes to writing, particularly writing which I feel has the potential to be shared or evaluated in some way I do a lot of thinking rather than producing. Peter Elbow (1998) identified this pattern of thinking as the inner critic: "The problem is that editing goes on at the same time as producing. The editor is, as it were, constantly looking over the shoulder of the producer (Elbow, 1998, p.5) This in turn causes me to experience writer's block which can go on for weeks if not months.

For this research assignment I wanted to explore what method I could use to 'unblock' my writing and ideally find my 'writer voice'. Specifically, I wanted to explore whether free writing would be a useful method of treating my obvious high expectations and rigidity as a writer.

### *EXPECTATIONS*

I have always believed that expectations are positive. They allow you to set and achieve goals, and to constantly strive for the best. Multiple factors meant that I grew up with high expectations of myself: growing up in a single parent

household, being a part of a large extended family and a member of a tight-knit community, and being the only female daughter (in the Eritrean community they tend to carry responsibility). Both in the home, and outside of it, I always felt the keen sense that I had and should do well.

This typically worked quite well for me, achieving success all throughout my schooling. Of course, the more I continued to do well the higher the expectations were of me. Including those of my teachers. I believe I thrived off of this until I 'failed' my A-levels, and ended up having to retake the year. The negative emotions I experienced during this time, meant that my feeling of wanting success and achievement intensified. In the lead up to my retakes I would spend unhealthy amounts of time studying and being in the library even if these sessions were not productive. My obsession with doing well, followed me into my undergraduate English course which led to further worry and anxiety about performing well. Mix this with feelings of racial inferiority, moving away from home for the first time and general isolation this was a recipe for disaster.

In hindsight the problem was not that I wanted to do well, it was that I was developing a fixed mindset about my performance. Rather than seeing 'intelligence as malleable (incremental view)' I saw 'giftedness as fixed (entity view)' (Buenconsejo et al, 2020, p.1). I either passed an exam or I did not; I was either good at English or I was not. Additionally, I was on a course where the majority of people (bar 5-6) were white, and middle class. The added fact of my peers coming from a more privileged economic background contributed to my feeling of inferiority and thus I started to believe that I was no longer "gifted" at English despite having a track recorded of achieving highly in the subject. Similarly, my lecturers who were entirely white, more than likely middle class and predominantly male were unable to relate to me. This meant that I had no way of challenging my mindset.

Now, as a postgraduate student, and a teacher, whilst circumstances have changed, I still note similar feelings of self-

doubt in my ability and high expectations to perform well. I realise now that a large part of this is internal rather than external. The seemingly high expectations I have of my own writing (that it should sound 'good', and be engaging) means at times that I can barely write. In particular, when I know my writing is going to be assessed as with this course, I experience great anxiety about what to write, as well as doubt about the quality of my writing and ultimately, I become blocked.

### *WRITER'S BLOCK*

Writer's block "is said to be relatively new, originating—or at least first named— during the Romantic era of the early-nineteenth century; however, other sources claim 1947 as the date of coinage of the term" (Castillo 2014). It is a complex idea in that there is no simple cause or solution. Writer's block in its usual sense is when a "writer simply cannot seem to write, despite a strong urge to do so" (Moore, 2018, p.351). However, Moore (2018) asserts other forms of writer's block such as the inability to write in a chosen form or dissatisfactions with "with the dribs and drabs the writer actually manages to wrest out of him" (Moore, 2018, p.351).

Castillo (2014) adds that 'writer's block can be selective where she for example avoids writing and chooses to write in other forms or "more seriously, writer's block can be a manifestation of a dangerous underlying psychiatric disease such as schizophrenia, obsessive compulsive disorder, or substance abuse" (Castillo, 2014, p.1043).

As Boice (1993) highlights multiple factors can lead to writer's block including fear, high expectations, impatience, and rigid rules around writing (Boice, 1993, p.28-29). Rigidity and perfection for example can "prevent writers from exploring ideas that may enter their minds at a given time" which in the initial stages of production can be limiting (Wynne, 2014, p.367). As Elbow (1998) rightly points out "control comes after the fact of writing...after an initial wandering"

(Elbow, 1998, p.95). On the other hand, boredom can also contribute to a lack of feeling stimulated and consequently blocking can occur (Haager, J S et al, 2018)

In my own case, I believe that my inner critic causes me to overly criticise my writing and therefore discard of it as rubbish and unworthy, before being able to share it. At the same time this has led to a growing feeling of anxiety when I have to write for an audience. The type of feelings I currently have about writing can be defined as writing apprehension: “highly apprehensive writers find writing unrewarding, even punishing. Consequently, they avoid, whenever possible, those situations that require writing ... and when they must write they experience more than normal amounts of anxiety”.

In a study looking at the impact of writing apprehension on writing production, it is interesting that “there were significant effects for apprehension when the essay was a personal narrative. No effects were observed for the argumentative topics” (Faigley, L et al, 1981, p. 20). This is interesting for me, I too identify that writing formally is easier than writing creatively, particularly when I am writing fiction which is influenced by my personal experience.

Part of the reason why academic writing may not generate much anxiety is due to the distance and partially objective nature of it. Whereas, personal writing can in some ways be closely linked to an author’s life and therefore there is less willingness to share it. Having said this, I still experience anxiety when writing essays especially those which will be assessed.

#### *TREATMENTS FOR WRITER’S BLOCK*

From an academic perspective Boice (1993) highlights that the tacit skills of writing fluency need to be taught in order to overcome writer’s block. He suggests that there is a resistance to teach this knowledge as lecturers “prefer demonstrations of brilliance in their students and in themselves” (Boice, 1993, p.47). When I consider my

academic career, spanning over 12 years: BA English with a year abroad, PGCE English, MA in Creative Writing and Education I would argue that the explicit teaching of writing has only occurred this year. For this reason, I agree with Boice. How can students be expected to write fluently or well without the understanding of how to do this?

Tuck's (2016) study considered the impact of academic teachers views of writing on student writing. As a whole "student writing was seen as having little to do with disciplinary knowledge-building, hence writing work as having little to do with disciplinary teaching." (Tuck, 2016, p.1619) This in turn was found to impact the support given to students which remains less integral to learning. She notes that "academics' work with student writers was often either endured as a routine 'extra' requirement... or passed elsewhere" (Tuck, 2016, p.1621). Similarly, as part of her study Tuck (2016) found that academics views around writing were also influenced by time, a lack resources as well as concerns around their identity as academics.

Harber, K et al (2019) study also revealed how the identity of academics, especially where their sense of equity is challenged, can impact student support. Their study highlights that a writer's race can affect the content and the style of the feedback they receive. Not only this they found that the content of feedback is in contrast to its style in that minority learners "experience overly positive evaluations enveloped in accommodating style" (Harber et al, 2019, p.1235) as part of a positive bias. One of the consequences which they noted was that students may be deprived "of a more advance vocabulary and more rigorous deliberation" which would benefit their learning (Harber et al, 2019, p.1235).

In general, there is no singular method of treating writer's block. It remains a contested and complex problem. Treatments range from automatic writing, to creative a regime, and monitoring negative self-talk (Boice, 1993). Similarly, Castillo (2014) proposes a line of treatment for

different levels of blockage. The treatment I most identify with is setting more “realistic goals, give yourself permission to be less than perfect” (Castillo, 2014, p.94).

Which is in line with Moore’s comment that writers must question “are we suffering from impostor syndrome and developing unrealistic perfectionist tendencies in order to compensate for it?” (Moore, 2018, p.351).

For the purpose of this assignment, I will be exploring how free writing, as a single method works to unblock my writing and shift my fixed outlook on writing and the processes which surround it.

### *WRITING AS A PROCESS*

Romantic ideals around writing suggest that individuals can access an innate unconscious source of imagination. However, this thought can lead to blocking because it removes the idea of writing as growing, and developing rather than automatically imaginative and perfect.

Jonathan Monk (2016) challenges the thought that writing is innate by teaching his students about the drafting process using what he terms as the iceberg metaphor. This demonstrates “the process beneath the polished exterior of a professionally produced and edited” piece of work (Monk, 2016, p.100). This method of explicitly teaching the writing process benefited his students in that they could now see that writing is a dynamic process of “mix and match and compromise” (Monk, 2016, p.106).

Paul Williams (2016) also encourages his students to overcome perfectionism by encouraging them to write freely before editing: “practiced regularly, it undoes the ingrained habit of editing at the same time you are trying to produce. It will make writing less blocked” (Williams, 2016, p.369). Over time he suggests that students will develop the judgement of when to edit.



As an educator, I have been guilty of requiring students to either overly plan their writing or review their writing against a success criterion before being able to produce a significant amount of free writing. Williams (2016) highlights that “student resistance to editing work is not always laziness: it can also be seen as an affront, as interference in their creative spontaneity” (Williams, p.369). Rather than teaching students how to meet SPAG criteria, more emphasis should be placed on encouraging students to feel confident in developing their ideas. This is particularly difficult in schools given the national emphasis on testing and results which means time for exploring may be limited.

Berold (2015) an academic at Rhodes university corroborates the idea that instilling students with the confidence and skills to write is of utmost importance: “we start by encouraging them to respect their vulnerability and to respect their own writing, however banal it may seem to them” (Berold, 2015, p.140).

Like the academics above, published authors also advocate that writing is best done on a regular basis, in a measured way. For example, Marshall Moore (2008) details his routine:

“I attribute much of my output over the years to the writing I do most mornings while I’m drinking coffee and starting my day. Such a modest routine is at odds with the glamorous torment writers are supposed to experience” (Moore, 2008, p.357).

Free writing then is a reasonable treatment for blocked writers in that it requires little time and can be used to form a regular writer’s routine.

### *FREE WRITING*

Free writing, championed by Peter Elbow (1998), has its roots in automatic writing. The fundamental idea being that one writes without stopping. As a method, this is used to overcome writer's block. Elbow uses a useful metaphor of writing as 'cooking' to highlight the benefit of regular free writing as an "organic, developmental process in which you start writing at the very beginning— before you know your meaning at all— and encourage your words gradually to change and evolve" (Elbow, 1998, p.15) Education, Elbow (1998) argues "makes us obsessed with the "mistakes" we make in writing" (Elbow, 1998, p.5) which is unhelpful in the early stages of the writing process.

Abi Curtis (2009) upholds the developmental idea of writing as opposed to the view that writing can be tapped into from an unconscious source. Instead, she advocates that writing can be "found through the process of writing" (Curtis, 2009, p.111). Krueger (2015) agrees "that writing is a way of thinking" (Krueger, 2015, p.103) thus writers do not need to plan every detail before writing.

Free writing as a method is not without its criticisms or difficulties. For example, "some academics mistakenly perceive the creative, playful aspects of freewriting as childish or purposeless" (Castle, 2017, p.130). Similarly, some academics find it difficult to adopt this method since they "have been taught that writing is an activity that comes after research, that is, after reading, thinking and data analysis" (Castle, 2017, p.129.)

However, for the purposes of gathering ideas and having material to consider drafting in the first place, I believe that free writing is a valuable method. As Mills (2006) points out you need to have "raw material for the craftsman or critic to work upon" (Mills, 2006, p.44).

## *METHODOLOGY*

For this assignment I wanted to use freewriting as a tool to unblock myself and produce regular writing. I decided to write for 7 days, for a minimum of 20 minutes. Due to the nature of my job as a full-time secondary school teacher, with additional responsibilities as Head of Year 7, I refrained from specifying a set time of the day.

The plan was to write freely for 7 days without editing my writing. Then on the 8th day to read over my free writes and identify any reoccurring themes. From this I would then consider if I had any useful material for a story. My hope was to see if I could unearth material that might be useful for my creative dissertation project.

## *ANALYSIS OF DATA*

Summary of each free write

Kid late for school hiding the facts he has a sick mother from his teachers

A man who has lost his wife trying to pull himself together as a single parent

Monologue of a male patient in a psychiatric ward

Female narrator imagining her future

Anonymous overwhelmed character

Male character at a bar

Female student worrying

Male prison guard watching a boy and his father

## *THEMES*

### DETERMINATION

So much of this last year 21-22 has been filled with trials including: the loss of three family members, one of which was

## *Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

a father figure to me, becoming a Head of Year alongside teaching full time, and contracting Covid whilst in the second year of my masters. It's no wonder that the characters in my free writing have this same determination.

For example, a male student fighting to get to school despite his mother having stage 4 cancer.

“What’s the standard for a hard life, I think? Do they know my mother’s sick or should I tell them...stage 4 in KS4...No. I hold face and make my way to Mr. McHugh’s Math’s class.” Freewrite 1

Another character, a male, in a psychiatric ward trying to fight to keep his sanity and see his children.

“Apparently. I’m on watch but what they don’t know is I’m a superhero able to defend myself...I’m waiting for my babies; they’ll be coming at the end of the month.” Freewrite 3

Finally, even in a reflective internal monologue the feeling of determination arises. “The edge of joy so close and in reach.” Freewrite 4

## LOSS

In line with the above theme, the idea of loss pervades 6 out of 7 free writes. Given that I experienced so much loss this year again it is interesting that this theme shows up in my writing.

For instance, a male character fighting to care for his son following the loss of his wife

“Her weight still lingers on her side of the bed. When he is very still, he can almost imagine her, the length of her body, the nook of her neck, the bouncy curls on her head” Freewrite 2

## *Creative Power*

Another monologue, the narrator has lost his or her self and is trying to reclaim themselves “Take control you think, take back you”. Freewrite 5

In a similar way another character is also losing himself and his money through his addiction to alcohol.  
“He rifles in his pockets for another note.” Freewrite 6

### MISRECOGNITION

As is most of the time with difficult circumstances people tend to hide what they are going through in order to appear better off. I for one do this almost unconsciously, and this I believe is a behaviour I picked up from my home environment but also one I observe in my cultural community. In a similar way each of the characters in my free writes do this. This in turn generates a misunderstanding between central characters and the people around them.

For instance, a father has to hide his difficulty of being a single parent: “he hadn’t imagined the parent play dates, having to stick around after school and find something useful to say.” Freewrite 2

A narrator who is fixed on his or her internal conflict reflects explicitly on the outside world “my neighbour doesn’t realise the strength it takes to smile.” Freewrite 4

A student reflects on her past academic failure but specifically a moment of misunderstanding between her and her mother: “remembering it now seemed distant, somehow invalid but she would never forget her mother’s eyes the look of disappointment...the absolute silence”. Freewrite 7

The above moment is unconsciously autobiographical in that I too had a similar moment with my mother when I told her I had not passed my A-levels.

## FEELING TRAPPED

As a consequence of each of the themes expressed so far there is a clear sense of feeling trapped, sometimes expressed as frustration. I know that I have felt several moments of frustration and wanting to give up in the past year.

“I’ve been in this room for the last week. My sweat is firmly embedded into the walls...I dare not open the curtains and offer myself up to the world”. Freewrite 3

A very vivid image of being trapped comes from an anonymous overwhelmed character:

“Stress hangs like glue...a cloud hovering over joy not allowing new growth...it saps from the life source...it lines the organs, then seeps in, then gushes in...allowing this cloud to overtake...to weigh you down keep you from seeing any line of hope.

## FREWRITE 5

### MEMORIES

6/7 of my free writes deal with this theme as evidenced above. As someone who is deeply nostalgic, and has used nostalgia as a tool to deal with grief and change I can identify with my characters.

“I remember primary school...I loved the chicken drumsticks and smileys.”

Freewrite 1

As an anomaly a female character imagines her future with a love interest: imagine our home, warm and cosy minimalism chrome, clean...breakfast in the garden, his leg curling mine, coffee hot...together. Freewrite 4

8th Freewrite

Having read over 7 of my free writes and identified the above reoccurring themes, I decided to write an 8th free write to

## *Creative Power*

see how I could bring these themes together, again without allowing for my inner critic to edit. The following is an excerpt of this piece of writing which demonstrates that.

A small boy sits at the white table swinging his feet. The security guard eyes him with suspicion and is mildly irritated by the smile plastered over his face.

He is here to see his father, but he doesn't care. He simply guides him to his seat, and walks back to his post.

He is trying his best to not close his eyes; he could miss a sign; he could risk his job and he has children to feed at home. He chose to keep off the streets and work for his family. After his wife died, there was no one to cook with or clean alongside. There was no one to ask how his day was.

He realises this little boy looks like his son Makiah. He stiffens when he sees his father, takes offence at the patting down he gives his son. He sees the boy chatting away whilst his father focuses on something on the wall.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this research assignment was to use freewriting as a tool to unblock my writing. The results of this research demonstrate that free writing is a valuable tool to silence negative thoughts, overcome rigidity, and avoid editing in favour of producing writing. The most useful nature of freewriting for me is the low stakes involved. Writing for 20 minutes, or less in some instances meant that there was less room for unhelpful thoughts or frustration to interfere with my writing.

With each free write the process I felt became easier. However, depending on the time of day, and the environment I wrote in, I found that the exercise was more conducive to unblocking. For the purpose of this assignment I wrote at home, work and sometimes in coffee shops. If I were to continue probing the benefit of this method, I would try to

write in a fixed space for a longer period of time in order to judge which environment is most fitting. Similarly, controlling the time of day would also be beneficial. As it stands, I believe mornings are more suitable because of the busy nature of my schedule. As Boice (1993) suggests combining various methods of treatment, in this case freewriting and a structured routine could be more beneficial and long lasting. One other method of treatment I could try is sharing my work with others. This would keep me accountable and give me a regular source of positive criticism which is valuable. Similarly, sharing in a small group would allow me to become more confident in sharing my writing.

As research suggests negative self-talk, and rigidity amongst other things can lead to blocking. One of the crucial fixed thoughts I have now successfully overcome is the need to plan before writing. I now see that writing is a journey and planning can occur simultaneously or after initial writing. Further evidence of this is that this research project enabled me to “find” the stimulus for my dissertation project. A story about a British Eritrean young man who goes missing due to the high expectations, and lack of understanding he faces in his environment.

In addition, another negative thought I had about my writing was that I had nothing interesting to write about, and perhaps not enough life experience. However, these free writes have revealed that my own life is full of themes, and ideas which are useful for writing. My life has a way of naturally being tied up with my writing. Going forward though, I believe it would be worth writing down and keeping track of negative self-talk in order to be able to reflect and challenge these thoughts as and when they come.

Another area of concern has been finding my “voice” as a writer. Other writers of dual heritage experience similar difficulties of authenticity and voice and have to make choices about the position from which they can write from. Rilla



Askew (2009) for example considers her own difficult position:

“...how was I going to claim to be a writer of Indian descent when my fair, freckled sisters don’t “feel” Indian? Even if I don’t put Cherokee or Choctaw after my name, to join with Indian writers would be a silent declaration—a type of passing. And so, I quit submitting stories for collections of Indian writings” (Askey, 2009, p.57).

Whilst I’m still not entirely sure that I have found the perfect voice to write in, or a way of resolving my position as female, black, Eritrean and British I have instead developed the commitment to write regularly which I believe will lead to me closer to this goal. The best place I believe is starting to embrace all the strands of my identity and let them freely show up in my writing; “the writer’s skin is ...not of blood...but layers of experience and choice” (Askey, 2009, p.57).

Finally, this research assignment forced me to consider why I write. I realise the high expectation and goal of eventually publishing work is not the only reason I write. Instead, I write for pleasure and more importantly to make sense of the world around me. I believe this revelation will allow me to have longevity as a writer.

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## **GIVING YOUNG WRITERS A VOICE: DANJA SANOVIC**

*An exploration of approaches of teaching creative writing to secondary school students*

AQA Task: Write a story about a magical world as suggested by this picture:



‘Mum, Mum!’ Charlie shouted to attract his mother’s attention. ‘Is it Christmas Day yet?’ his mother replied gently with a no. Since he had just woken up his mother told him to get himself ready for the day ahead.

Immediately after she told him to get ready he had rushed into the bathroom to clean up because he knew what was going to be happening today, Charlie had waited a long, long time for this day to occur.

He couldn’t contain his excitement so he called his best friend Mike to explain what he was doing today. After a few minutes of talking on the phone, the door-bell suddenly rang. BING BONG! The loud door-bell sound echoed through the house. He ran to the door to then be greeted by favourite cousin.

## *Creative Power*

After they had caught up on family life they all travelled by car to the exciting destination. On the car ride Charlie could feel his heart beating rapidly because he could not contain his happiness so he decided to listen to music on the way to calm himself down.

By the time Charlie listened to his favourite song five times on the repeat they arrived at their final destination. 'Yes finally we are here at the coolest place on earth. It's Winter Wonderland' Charlie exclaimed.

He had waited a whole year to be able to go back to his dream world. Out of nowhere the ground started to shake and people were running everywhere he started hyperventilating. Suddenly he woke up. 'It was a dream' he whispered to himself. He stood up from his bed and realised it was snowing. He grabbed his lucky snow-globe and stared out into the street to see his friends playing outside.

**AQA Task:** Describe a place you think is beautiful

My favourite place is a beautiful, golden, sparkly beach in Spain. We go there every year and we love it because it's warm and it's cheap to go there. The sand is yellow and it feels hot to touch. To most people this would be a put off but to me it's beautiful because I like the heat.

I can see the blue sea shimmering and glittering in front of me. I can see lots of people swimming in the sea, enjoying their summer holidays. The sea is really crowded and I love swimming in it. It's so warm like being in the bath.

I can smell the salty air and the sun cream. I smelt the fresh air all around me. On the beach I can taste the salty water and the ice cream we always buy after lunch. I can touch the water and the sand and I like to build castles with my little brother.

## *Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

All around me I can see sky, sand, sea and people enjoying themselves. I can see sun umbrellas, towels, children playing happily and adults talking and everyone swimming.

I heard people shouting and I heard the music playing and the waves crashing. I can hear the birds and people talking in Spanish and English.

This beach is the most beautiful place in the world and I can't wait to come back here.

**AQA Task:** Write a description of a mysterious place, as suggested by this picture



It was a cold, dark, winter night and the gates were big, tall, black, iron gates that opened to a scary, dark, cold cemetery. It was so dark you couldn't even see very well and the clouds were as dark as a crow. I could see the pointy tree branches that didn't have any leaves on them. There was a stone wall and that wall was made to look like the letter O. I was scared to go inside but my best friend said I dare you to go inside and so I went inside and I was really worried because I am scared of ghosts.

My best friend is called Jake and he said that we will need to go into this park because it was Halloween and on Halloween you have to do scary things. I said OK but I said I only want to stay five minutes. Jake and I went through these gates and

## *Creative Power*

inside was really spooky and desolate. We could hear crows calling out and we heard the rustling of the tree branches but other than those sounds it was just silent. I could only smell grass and leaves and I couldn't taste anything just my fear filling my mouth and tingling my tongue.

CRACK CRUNCH! I heard a sound and I said 'Jake what's that over there?' but Jake didn't hear anything. Then Jake fell into a big hole in the ground and we saw that it was a grave for someone. Jake twisted his ankle and he couldn't get up and I was panicking and I don't know what to do.

Then I heard that sound again CRACK CRUNCH and I saw who was making that sound. 'who are you and what are you doing in my grave?' said a man. He was really skinny and he was wearing a long dark coat and his fingers were bony. 'My friend has fallen in the hole' I said and Jake was screaming in pain. The man took the shovel and he lifted it over his head and that's when I passed out.

Later on I woke up. The man was a grave digger and he used the shovel to get Jake out. I was glad it all ended well and Jake told me we will never go to a mysterious place again. Especially not on Halloween!

**AQA Task:** Write a story about an event that cannot be explained

It was May 13th 2021 and I was on my way to my best friend Harifa's birthday. She was having a party at the bowling alley in Lewisham and there were lots of people going. I went there with my other best friend Tola and we were getting ready in my house before we went.

Tola said to me: "Hurry up Victoria, we don't have much time, we'll miss the bus" so I then finished getting ready. Then we left and we caught the 321 to Lewisham centre. It was so busy it had lots of people going shopping going to work and lots of people looking busy.

## *Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

Then we got to the bowling alley and I said to Tola “oh no we forgot Harifa’s birthday present” and Tola said “oh no I can’t believe we are so dumb”. We then had to decide if we should go to the party or if we need to go back to mine to get the present. Tola and I decided to go back to mine to get the present but just then a dark car pulled up right outside the bowling alley. It was black and it had black windows and it was loud. Inside there was loud music and then the car stopped right by us and it opened the window and I could just see an arm of a man. This arm was wearing a leather black jacket and it started moving towards us. I screamed and Tola started to run but the man pulled out something from the floor of his car and he passed it to me. And then I saw that it was actually the present we got for Harifa because it had the same wrapping paper which was all pink with gold and silver stars and hearts that glittered.

I couldn’t see the man’s face just his hand and I took the present and said ‘thank you. Who are you’ but the man didn’t say nothing. Then he closed the window and the car drove away. Tola didn’t see anything because she was inside getting help and she came back out with Harifa and they looked at me and I said ‘happy birthday Harifa. This is from me and Tola’.

Tola said ‘where did you get that’ and I said I’ll tell you when we go inside because I didn’t want to spoil Harifa’s special day. Then when I told Tola later she said ‘no way’ and we still don’t know who that man was and how does he have our present. Was he a ghost?

AQA Task: Describe a market place as suggested by this picture





There is a market place at the end of the street. It is very busy with people buying food for their dinner. The market place is as busy as a beehive. Lights are shining in the darkness of the market place. CRASH! A fruit box fell over. BANG! A box of fish falls over. Everyone is running around. It's an earthquake. All the peppers and cheese and oranges are on the floor and people are screaming and crying. All the bags are on the floor and people don't know what happened.

The market place no longer looks the same it's now just one big mess and there is blood everywhere and children can't find their parents. I can see a box of white mushrooms and I can smell the fish which is not all over the floor. I can taste the dust from the ground and I can see a van. Someone is putting all the fruit and vegetables in the van.

I went to help out but I see that they are stealing all the food so I call the police and the police get here but the van driver has drove away and I didn't get the licence plate number. So I help the policeman to clean up a little bit and we called an ambulance.

### **Background**

The first piece of creative writing I can remember was a classroom composition I wrote in primary school. It was a very patriotic piece about World War II and I still remember the opening line in Montenegrin: "Bio je rat. Brat je pucao na

brata". A very crude translation of this would be along the lines of: "It was war. Brother shot at his brother." I was ten years old and this piece was entered into a regional creative writing competition which I won. I still remember arriving at the award ceremony, late, with my father so that we had to stand to the side of the seated sea of parents and children who waited for the winner to be announced. In front of us stood an official with a clipboard and I could clearly see the words "winner, number 29". That was my entry number. I was a perfect mixture of excitement and calm as I turned to my father to let him know I won. He did not believe it when soon after my name was called and I was ushered onto a stage. There, in shaky voice, I read my short piece to a room full of strangers.

I can still remember the thrill of winning as well as the frustration I felt when weeks earlier I tried to write this piece. It took me a long time to think of what to write. I agonised for a while and I talked to my mother about it. She was the one who suggested I think about opening my piece with something emotive and evocative. Once I had those first two sentences, I was on my way. Everything else seemed to roll out of my mind and down the fountain pen onto a lined page. Booker (2004) calls this 'the extent to which stories emerge from some place in the human mind which functions autonomously; independent of any storyteller's conscious control' (Booker, 2004, p.320). Once I understood that the hardest part for me was starting, my self-belief in my writing ability grew. It was not the case of not knowing how to write, it was not knowing how to start. With the help of my mother and my teacher I was given thinking time as well as help in developing my thoughts and ideas. Cremin, Gooch and Lambirth (2005) argue that the 'seeds of young writer's stories and other forms of writing need constant nurturing and support as well as time to evolve and reverberate' (Cremin, Gooch & Lambirth, 2005, p.13). I therefore believe that modelling thought and writing practices to students as well as giving them time to develop their own writing in their own authentic voice is essential in helping them grow as writers.

## **Context**

For the past twenty years I have worked as an English teacher in a number of secondary schools. I have seen through my own lived experience how the teaching as well as examining of creative writing has changed. Gone are the days of my early teaching career when I was given time to develop my students' creative writing skills through teaching this topic discretely every year during their secondary schooling. Now, creative writing is often taught as a bolt on – an added necessity which English teachers are not always skilled enough to teach. Webb (2020) points out that 'English teachers are not writers. Our subject is vast and unforgivably complex' (Webb, 2020, p.17). We are in the business of teaching textual analysis, critical reading, comparison, evaluation, spelling, punctuation and grammar and writing skills which are divided into writing to persuade and writing to narrate and describe. English teachers mainly come into teaching after completing a degree in English Literature, armed to help their students analyse anything from Shakespeare to Adichie, but far too often they are not confident or practising writers.

I have always loved writing and sharing my work with my students. My colleagues have on many occasions asked me to 'knock something up to help them teach creative writing'; a quick story, or a quick description that might take me no time they would agonise over for hours on end to then only feel too self-conscious to share in front of their classes. However, they did not feel like this when showing my work because of a degree of separation between them and that piece of creative writing and because they believed I could do it easily, as I write in my spare time. Latham (2019) discusses Cremin and Oliver's findings in their systematic review of teachers as writers and concludes that 'teachers have narrow conceptions of what counts as writing and have low opinions of their abilities as teachers of writing' (Latham, 2019, p.397). My colleagues faced creative writing with a fixed mindset which often led them away from 'challenges that might unmask their

deficiencies and made them withdraw in the face of difficulties' (Dweck, 2015, Google Talk). So when it comes to creative writing both my colleagues and students experienced 'trigger points' (ibid) which prohibited them from developing their abilities.

While I find inspiration and love teaching creative writing, often through freewriting, my colleagues have learnt to resort to teaching the soul sucking, feature spotting, formulaic approaches that are often criticised by the AQA examining board:

there were a significant number of responses that were hindered by contrived and ill-applied 'wow' words. Students should be advised that 'advanced' vocabulary does not add quality unless the words are used sparingly and with understanding (AQA, June 2019, p.7).

some students still managed to include a contrived use of senses, describing what they could see, hear and smell (AQA, November 2018, p.8).

some students continue to produce formulaic responses with a contrived use of senses: I can see/I can hear/I can smell. Others continue to include over-ambitious vocabulary that is misused and obscures meaning. Writing skills obviously need to be taught, but there is also an argument for not over-preparing students with formulaic methods, especially for creative writing (AQA, June 2018, p.8).

I have reflected here on what pedagogical approaches I employ when I am teaching creative writing and considered how I ensure that I offer permission and validation to young writers to write about their worlds which are rich and complex.

## **Models and Exercises**

I have created six pieces using AQA prompts which have been published in the last three AQA English Language examination

series. I came to write imitation pieces of GCSE creative writing by trying to embody the teenage voices which I have come across during my teaching career. I wanted to create writing which is resonant of how young people respond to these tasks, often trying to jam in the recipe requirement in their narrative and descriptive writing.

In the three descriptive pieces (tasks two, three and five) I wanted to show how students cling onto the formulaic sensory description, closely clutching onto the 'I hear, I see, I smell' methodology, without necessarily developing their description. In the three narrative pieces (tasks one, four and six) I have tried to demonstrate a lack of understanding of how stories work, how structure aids the story telling and how trying to focus on features (DAFORREST etc.) produces tired and clichéd writing. I wanted to use those pieces to show my students that what we deem as 'talents' are actually also abilities which 'can be developed through hard work, strategies and mentoring' (Dweck, 2015, Google Talks); creative writing which might not be considered excellent can be improved through 'taking on challenges' (ibid). My pieces would then become a resource for 'worked examples and backward fading, or stepped modelling and practice with worked examples' (Sherrington & Caviglioli, 2020, p.67).

I also wanted to show the potential and the naivety which is often noted in young people's writing as well as the cruelty and the affective dimension of teenagers offering their personal thoughts and feelings and receiving poor grades as these do not fit within a strict assessment rubric. Therefore, by using these pieces I wanted to explore the tensions of teaching creative writing within the bounds of the assessment rubric and what this means for young writers: a lack of real world writing opportunities and a focus on recipe approaches to writing.

As Cognitive Load theory asserts that 'novices learn more successfully from studying a series of complete worked examples' (Sherrington & Caviglioli, 2020, p.68), these

exercises could be used to prompt students' writing. After a series of freewriting exercises which would explore students' writing from life (such as write about your name, list the places you like to hide as a child, tell the story of one of your scars, write about your safe place, write about your family meal), we could use my models to unpick what does and does not work in each one, therefore engaging in 'metacognitive talk' (ibid) through narrating the thinking behind writing. This will allow students to plan, monitor and evaluate their progress (Quigley & Muijs, 2021) through the task. We could focus on how formulaic writing differs from authentic writing and how writing from life can be used to 'make sense of even the most arbitrary and unrelated elements by creating relationships between them' (Ross in Webb, 2020, p.37). My models would then be used as a springboard to either rewrite, draft or edit with a view to create pieces which engage all three faculties 'the logical, the emotional and the imaginative, at the same time' (ibid).

## **Pedagogy**

### Culture

There is much to be said for an honest response where the student's voice can be heard, rather than an artificial, contrived construction (AQA, June 2018, p.8).

It is precisely this 'honest response' written in 'students' own voice' that is lacking from teaching and creative writing in secondary schools today. We are doing young people a huge disservice by not exploring their diverse voices. Work has begun on decolonising literature and as teachers we are mindful of introducing diversity of writers and creating diverse curriculums because 'as academics, we now see the importance of destabilising privilege by championing 'alternative' types of knowledge' (Begum & Saini, 2019). So the stories we teach and the stories we tell our students must reflect their own experiences and not only the ingrained sense

of British superiority which saturate any given English syllabus of taught texts. We must always be aware that:

stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanise. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity (Adichie, 2009).

By cultivating a teaching practice that embeds creative writing teaching pedagogy which supports and champions writing of diverse voices, we not only give permission to students to write authentically what they know, but we also validate and elevate their experiences.

We cannot simply erase colonial stories and decide we will no longer be influenced by colonial ideology and thus make it so. The only way to account for these colonial stories is to engage with them and directly confront the tensions, discomfort, and difficult truths they raise. This is how we will support future generations in remembering the past and telling different stories in the future. This intergenerational commitment is an essential part of decolonizing education that characterizes Indigenous, African diaspora, and other philosophies of education for liberation (Hampton & DeMartini, 2017, p.268).

It is precisely this idea of engaging with colonial stories which inspired my writing. In Task 2 I have written from a perspective of a teenager who describes a place that is beautiful. I would use this as a spring board for exploring the ways in which to capture young writers' voices rather than jamming recipe writing down their throats. The next writing activity would ask them to examine the meaning of beauty and to consider finding it closer to home through writing about home and home customs which they find beautiful; this could be meal times with extended family, celebration of Eid or Diwali or Christmas, it could be visiting family out of the UK, or just simply talking about the unique set up of their homes. Almond (2001) writes about the deliberate exploration of

home in writing. He argues that 'the local can contain the universal. The part can stand for the whole' (Bell & Magrs, 2001, p.175). Young peoples' writing should be given permission to reflect their own worlds, the spaces they occupy and which make up their identity. Their writing need not be peppered with holidays to Spain or walks by the river. It should be peppered with names and words of other languages, of smells and tastes of other cultures; to young writers it should feel as natural to write about baba as about dad, or to name their character Tola or Razvan rather than Katie or Sam. After all, all those children of colour I have encountered in my teaching, or all those children of diaspora (like myself) would find it liberating and joyful to see themselves represented in their own writing as well as in the writing of their peers.

Bolton (2011) suggests young writers often feel inhibited by teachers' instruction of 'how to do things properly, rather than working from children's experiences, skills, needs and wants' (Bolton, 2011, p.68). Clark and Ivanic (1997) clarify the link between writing and cultural capital:

children are expected to write in the standardised form of English, which is closest to spoken, south-eastern, white middle-class forms, and this makes it even more difficult for those children who do not bring these spoken forms to school with them (Clark and Ivanic, 1997, p.46).

This language inequality sends a clear message to young writers: that writing that is worthy should be homogenous and anglicised. Message such as this is dangerous and political and it is something that must be tackled with urgency.

Rosen talks about 'collecting language' of speech as well as writing. He argues that it is important to 'focus children and students on their own speech and the speech of the people they hear around them' (Rosen, 2018, p.13). It is through anthologising of these 'sayings, proverbs, aphorisms, slips of the tongue' (ibid) that young writers will be able to enrich



their writing by making it authentic and focused. Collecting language, therefore, will free young writers from this constraint as once they become aware that their personal expression is valued they will continue to build a library of how their language works, not just the language which they are taught to use in school, and through this they will be able to create convincing and tangible voices. By demonstrating that language belongs to them and is not a prerogative of teachers', young writers will be able to think of their language as being just as vital and poetic as anyone's. It is this act that will give them permission to write in their own voice.

Similarly Heathcote (1971) talks about teaching drama by refusing to shy away from drawing from life:

I won't water down drama. I use situations that authors use, the real tense situations of life, and if the teacher puts the tension there, the 'real' follows. (Heathcote, 1971, *Three Looms Waiting* documentary).

Just as Heathcote proclaims: 'rocks and trees, fairies and wearing leotards – this is nothing to do with real drama. Drama is a real man in a mess' (ibid) so I, too, would argue that creative writing is a real person in a mess and that we should allow young writers to write about the person and the mess in the way they best know how; after all they know that person and they know that mess. It is part of them and their lives.

### **Suggested Exercises:**

Write about your home: what does it look like? Go from room to room and describe what you see. How does your home smell? Who has been cooking? Do they always cook? Write about what is on the walls of your home. Who lives there? What are their names? What do you eat as a family? Use lists of foods and write about how family meal times in your home look.

Collect your language: how do you speak at home? Write a natural dialogue you would have with your parents, grandparents, siblings. Include language or phrases you use at home, even if these are not in English (or even standard English). How do you speak with your friends? Again, collect the words, phrases, dialects you use. Write a natural dialogue using these.

### **Writing from Life**

Each of my constructed narrative pieces reflects what I have seen young writers do countless, in my experience as an AQA examiner. Often narrative arcs are forced or far-fetched and writing is often too complicated and unconvincing: it lacks attention to detail and true representation of the teenage experience. It is as if young people write about what they think a faceless (most likely white, and male) examiner would like to read. It is no surprise then that their writing is detached and clichéd: their original writing is derivative, over-written and heavily seeped in abstract!

In order to combat this, I like to give young writers a journal at the start of the course and explain the principles of free writing. Crucially I explain that 'it is like writing something and putting it in a bottle in a sea' (Elbow, 1998, p.3); this writing could be for their eyes only or it could be shared with anyone they chose.

Hobbs (tutorial, 15th March, 2022) explains that the literary charity First Story is underpinned by three core principals when teaching creative writing: encouraging students to write as much as possible in own voice, encouraging students to write about own lives – things they know, encouraging students to embrace the specific. The idea of writing about young writers' own lives underpins my creative writing pedagogy. I have discovered that they often saw their lives as boring through not valuing their lives and not paying enough attention. Their views are frequently confirmed as their lives are seen as lacking representation in literature they study,

they see their lives as somehow marginalised in culture. My narrative models could be used as a spring board for improving students' writing through a series of exercises which examine the experiences they know well: immigration, heartache, coming out, loss, racism. I would encourage students to write carefully observed pieces heavy in concrete detail and without clichés and abstract feeling. As Cottrell Boyce (2008) writes 'the magic of stories is that the more specific you are, the more universal they seem to get.'

### **Suggested Exercises:**

Think of a dull activity which you do daily such as packing your school bag. Write in as much detail as possible.

Zooming in on details: describe your journey to school today. Pay attention in the way you have not done before. Make your description specific and precise.

Freewrite for ten minutes under the title: this is what I want you to know about me. Be as specific as possible.

Sweet memories: write about your favourite sweet treat as a child. What memory do you associate with it? Imagine it in your hands and imagine tasting it again. What does it feel like texturally, what does it taste like and how does it make you feel?

### **The Process**

As a writer I have often felt the frustration which comes with the art of writing. When I write I seem to bring to the table the two personas which Carson calls the writer and the editor. He argues that 'the editor wants to make something good; the writer wants to make something. How much of writing is about control and how much is about letting go? (Morley & Neilsen, 2012, p.133). I have often stared down at the blank page, feeling the terror seeping from the emptiness, wondering if I will ever be able to write something, anything! This is not a solitary feeling. I have in my twenty years of teaching found that emotive elements of writing are shared by

teachers and students alike. Therefore, when teaching creative writing to young writers, it is our responsibility to not only 'model creativity' (Cremin, 2015, p.353), or scaffold their learning 'under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers' (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86), but to also share with them our own emotional processes – to teach them about growth mindset and dispel the myth of the fixed mindset that 'one's qualities are carved in stone' (Dweck, 2017, p.12).

It is a sophisticated skill to be able to know the difference between good and bad writing, and teaching this skill is essential in disrupting classrooms in order to create meaningful and revolutionary creative writing. Heathcote (1971) refers to this a 'the mantle of the expert': treating young writers as responsible experts increases their engagement and confidence and allows teachers to create a 'common frame of reference' (Fiore, 2015, p.821) so that we are 'able to gain a greater level of access to the students, perhaps even a level of trust' (ibid). I would use my exercises to not only share my process but also to create meaningful talk around the fear of criticism and the wrestle, I as a writer sometimes have, when I 'wilt in the face of failure and shy away from challenges' (Dweck, 2015, Google Talk).

Finally, the process must also examine how to stimulate creative writing more organically, rather than by using tired writing frames and inauthentic scenarios. Cremin, Gooch, Blakemore, Goff & Macdonald (2006) conclude that teachers should 'seize the moment' to write, often through giving 'precedence to drama' as this is likely to produce writing which is 'vital and connected part of the imagined experience' (Cremin et al, 2006, p.266). I do understand that the pressures of secondary English curriculum prohibit the fun and the frivolous in the classroom, but I would strongly argue that if we continue to simply teach writing to the examination requirements we will not be able to facilitate writing which arises 'naturally in response to the situations encountered' (ibid). As Cremin et al conclude:

Working inside the fictional frame, the teachers expressed the view that they felt more involved in these dramas which were shaped by the themes and questions being investigated, rather than by a predetermined and imposed text type from the domain of literacy (ibid).

## **Conclusion**

As an English teacher I believe that I have a responsibility to facilitate learning, and creative writing is one of the most important pedagogical tools English teachers have at their disposal. The inequality gap within our society is wide, and it continues to expand. Neo-liberal policies have marginalised groups and left them voiceless and powerless. Writing can challenge this status quo, and as teachers of writing it is our duty to equip all young writers with ability to challenge, question and revolutionise the world they inhabit. It is through working with young writers in order to liberate their own authentic voices that we can make a difference both creatively and politically.

(5483 words)

## **Appendix**

AQA Task: Write a story with the title 'Abandoned'

It was the first day of our holiday. We were in Florida, USA and the weather was hot and humid. My mum and dad wanted to go and sit by the pool all day but I wanted to explore. I asked them if I can have a look around and they said OK.

"Make sure that we can see you", said mum.

"And you can see us", said dad.

I said, "OK".

But soon I was lost in the grounds of the big hotel because we've never been there before and I didn't know my way around it at all.

"It's OK", I sighed. "I'll find my way back soon".

But somehow I ended up on the main road outside the hotel. I started walking hoping to find a person to ask how to go back inside the hotel as the doors were now locked behind me. Soon I came across a big red van which was parked on the side. I asked them:

“Excuse me, please can you help me get back inside our hotel.” And the man then said: “yes I can help you. Come and sit down in the back and I’ll drive you to the hotel as I’m delivering food there to the kitchen”. I was worried to get into the van of a stranger but I saw the writing on the van and it said: Hotel Kitchen Delivery and I could see boxes of fruit in the back so I said “Thank you”.

As soon as I got in the van it started to drive. We were driving for a while and I was worried because by now we should be in the hotel and by now it was dark. I couldn’t see out of the windows because they were blocked with boxes. I heard the man’s radio playing music.

I was really scared and I started to cry. I shouted to the man “let me out please” but he just ignored me. I then heard the sound of the helicopters and I heard sirens. I heard the news come on the radio. It said: “a twelve year old British girl is missing from her hotel and the police are now searching for her. If you have any information please call 999”.

I could feel the van do a very sharp U-turn and we were skidding on the street. The man was now talking on the phone in a different language and I didn’t know what he was saying. I was crying and I felt so bad that I didn’t listen to my mum and dad.

Soon the van stopped. I was scared. My heart was pumping blood super fast all through my body. My nose was filling with fear. My heart was racing as fast as a cheetah and I was just waiting to see what the man was going to do. I look around the van for a weapon. Then he opens the door and says: “you need to get out now. Go! There’s your hotel! Hurry up!”.

I ran out of the van and I saw the hotel with lots of police and my mum and dad. My mum was sobbing like a baby and my dad looked so worried. I ran into their arms and we all cried

and hugged. I promised I would NEVER wonder off again and that I would always listen to them from now on.

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## **PARKLIFE POETRY: MASHA BOGODAGE**

Dear Reader,

When is the last time you wrote? What did you write about? What experiences do you have fossilised in your memories about writing? What are your feelings towards writing? What makes good writing? What is a piece of writing you enjoyed reading and why? These are some questions I often ask my students - do not worry, not all at once.

I love writing so I am always curious to see what my students' experiences and attitudes towards writing are. Creative writing has always been a source of comfort for me. From a young age, I remember wielding my humble hybrid lexical inventory of Sinhala and English together to transport myself away from reality into the imaginary worlds that exist between the lines of my pink padlocked journal. I write to imagine, understand, organise, communicate, and be heard. Why do you write?

Creative writing is a versatile and powerful tool, as such I knew I wanted to promote this skill beyond the confines of my English classroom. The wonderful English department at St Ursula's gave me the freedom and space to experiment with creative approaches to writing in lessons and clubs across KS3 and KS4 during my PGCE year.

The creative writing club was born through a single conversation about career options with Noemi, a bright student from my form group. This club soon became the highlight of my week. Ella, Nesia, Noemi, and Jennifer, the club's most regular members, are exceptionally gifted, collaborative, and brave in their writing; I enjoyed the collaborative experience of writing alongside them and watching their drafts transform with time and feedback.

## *Creative Power*

They have been immersed in the process of writing (think, plan, draft, edit, and publish). The topics we wrote about have been driven by their own interests. They have worked hard to group the poems they wrote into 4 themes. They were then each put in charge of a theme. In their individual roles as lead editors, they were encouraged to write an introduction and provide feedback on their section.

Writing is creative but also personal. Have you had a journal with a padlock? Not everything we write is seen by anyone other than us. To share our writing in print is to be vulnerable, to be brave, to be immortal. Therefore, it is with immense pride and joy that I present to you the brave and talented young writers of St Ursula's Convent School who have contributed to this anthology.

Best wishes,

Masha Michelle B

### *PERSONAL WRITING*

#### INTRODUCTION:

Writing is personal and cathartic. I find my ideas blossom in my mind when I look within, this links to the idea of 'doors'. Doors are interesting as they can be inviting when they open or they can be cold and uninviting when closed. The world is full of physical and metaphorical doors. In this next section, you will find each interpretation of a door is different. I think having creative freedom inspired people the most to write, to be able to come up with any possible outcome

What doors are there in your own life and can they be opened?

Best wishes,  
Jennifer Sealy

*Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

Poem name: Engulfing

Poet: Ella Ikhifa

The door was swallowed by the veins of the earth. It grasped at and pulled the wood back down in an effort to regain its roots. They tangled in an aimless fight between one another. The leaves grew larger, supported by its maker. Earth surrounded itself. The door returned to what it once was. The path to a new beginning now led to an old one. The stairs were now hidden and the earth lay rest.

Poem name: The door

Poet: Nesia Johnson-Pius

The door stood before me, the secrets of what lay behind it closed off from view.

The ivy grew tangled along the hinges.

The hinges which had once been used so often were now stuck, abandoned, and frozen in time.

Dust had gathered upon the chain shutting whatever was behind it.

It was trapped from the outside world.

Everything lay still.

Untouched, unkept and unloved.

I stood in silence; my gaze shifted to the rusted opening of the keyhole.

The key had long been lost.

The hole had become adorned with an intricate web of spider thread.

Poem name: Silence by Noemi Akossokon

Poet: Noemi Akossokon

She's breaking, she's falling, no help; silenced

Thoughts racing, heart pounding, one soul; violence

Conform to the rules of society, change, be pliant

Innocence, children; be seen not heard; quiet

She's scared, she's angry, an outcast, so she's silent.  
Six-word stories about silence by Noemi Akossokon

**BREAKING INTO PIECES; FALLING, FAILING, FINDING**

Still slow safe rumble shake broken.

*FRACTURED IDENTITY: FALLING, FINDING; FLYING*

INTRODUCTION:

Identity was one of our chosen themes that we thought was relatable amongst our age group. Finding your purpose in life, and establishing your chosen identity is a process that many find hard, and we wanted to showcase that through different aspects of identity. We wanted to illustrate the contrasts in life, and channel raw emotions to create these pieces. Through shared experiences, we comment on different aspects of life in general but within that- our fragments of identity.

Best wishes,  
Noemi Akossokon

Poem name: Journey of Solitude  
Poet: Nesia Johnson-Pius

Murmurs and mutterings,  
The constant background noises.  
Then, I look up at the sky,  
A swirl of watercolours.  
Then nothing,  
no one.

Silence and Sorrow,  
Not a human in sight.  
The birds sing a warning,  
The paper on the floor blows.  
Nothing but a fossil, a reminder,

Of those once before.

Crying and Calling,  
With no reply.  
The silence rings loud.  
Lost and alone with nowhere to go.  
My internal compass stopped showing the way home.

Fingerprints and Footsteps.  
They lead me along,  
To a bonfire, a flame.  
The light in my darkness.  
Smoke twisted and curled around my limbs,  
As that girl in a pinafore menacingly grinned.

Poem name: A bullet to the Head: Noemi Akossokon  
Poet: Noemi Akossokon

A fallen enemy  
A fallen friend  
A widowed wife  
A father- A dead  
An orphan child  
A blanket of dread  
A weeping mother  
A bullet to the head

A broken country  
A river- blood red  
A mountain of bodies  
Bodies that bled  
A soldier; a warrior  
A protector of men  
A trauma everlasting  
A bullet to the head

A clashing, a boom  
An explosion of fear  
A crash, a kill

*Creative Power*

Murderers- far and near  
Young boys at war  
Men killing men  
Fathers and sons gone  
A bullet to the head

Poem name: A bullet to the Head  
Poet: Noemi Akossokon

I remember a time  
when life was bliss.  
I reminisce, amidst  
the nature of man, and nature itself,  
the influence of yesterday grounds me  
I remember the innocence  
the pressure of youth; light, bear  
hardly there- much like the whisper of the sun that warms  
me,  
the light blinding  
the reality of men  
the duality of what is and what could be  
I remember  
But I yearn to forget  
By now I've learnt my lesson.  
I know what is and what should be  
Fear came to my house years ago  
And I let him in  
He had gotten comfortable  
As if he picked a room to settle in  
(Reference by song of NF)  
So, as I travel deeper into the heart of mother nature  
I fear the silence, unsettling  
I remember  
Help me forget

*Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

Poem name: A little Girl's fear

Poet: Noemi Akossokon

A fire raging in the night  
A light turned dark turned cold  
A vulgar demon weaponized  
A hatred never known  
A little girl, pure and untouched  
A mind where wanders roam  
A present from the past; fate  
A future set in stone  
A valley of despair; of fright  
A monster's frosty heart  
Hope and dreams banished by night  
Awoken with a start  
An evil chasing all who dare  
To bring a lightness here  
The little girl pure and untouched  
A face drowning in tears

Poem name: True Identity

Poet: Nesia Johnson-Pius

Look in the mirror, What do I see?  
a daughter,  
a sister  
Part of a loving family.

Look in the mirror, What do I see?  
a scholar,  
a student  
Who my parents want me to be.

Look in the mirror, What do I see?  
my hopes,  
my dreams  
The identity I hide inside of me.

Look in the mirror, What do I see?



*Creative Power*

a career,  
a future  
What is expected of me

Poem name: *Alongside you*  
Poet: Noemi Akossokon

I walk alongside you, on a path to a world unknown,  
leaving our mark on the world that was left to us.  
I walk alongside you, on a path to a future we now get to  
build,  
leaving our pain and the suffering of yesterday.  
I walk alongside you, ready to face the challenge of a 100  
tomorrows,  
but the test of time is woven into our souls.  
I walk, but you stride against me, a faceless image; my foe,  
A testament to my pain.  
I walk and you run.  
You chase; I fight.  
I wanted to walk alongside you, towards a new world, where  
we could leave our mark,  
but we fought, and we hurt.  
We are no longer alongside one another  
We are rage.  
We are hate.  
Now, we cannot walk alongside on our path,  
For we are broken  
We are forgotten.  
I have lost you to the strain of time.  
Our souls no longer intertwined  
You are shattered; a broken fragment in my mind.  
I have lost you, but still I walk alongside  
the memory of you, of your hope, of your love  
And the future of mankind

*Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

Poem name: Death  
Poet: Noemi Akossokon

Death; no sounds, no room, no-one  
Solace in solidarity.  
Death; bleak, cold, still  
Warmth in winter  
Death; beloved death  
Once in a lifetime  
Come; I await you  
Pain; a burning ache of everlasting chaos  
Death; an endless peace of mind  
Liberate me  
Free me  
Death; I am waiting

Poem name: Enough  
Poet: Jennifer Sealy

To the eyes that follow  
You insult me with whispers  
The straw has killed this camel  
And yet your eyes still follow, silently  
The camel lies, lifeless, limp, and lonely  
Withering whilst waiting for a dream  
Its fur inherently ruffled and rumpled  
By the sadist called life  
The innocent beast cries out  
An unforgiving God answers.

Poem name: Rabid  
Poet: Jennifer Sealy

The dying is slow, merciless and agonizing  
Your actions sear your insides  
Each word escaping is not yours

A cruel creature is pulling you by the hair  
Foaming at the mouth

## *Creative Power*

Hungry for your gradual self-destruction  
It's wicked teeth dripping with your thoughts  
Replacing them with mindless sentences

A small ball builds up at the back of your throat  
Your brain struggling with the words  
A quiet small, weak beginning of a word stumbles out

The creature drools with anger  
An inhumane cry is let out  
It's movements frantic and concerning  
The being, rips your tongue out  
And replaces it with a thoughtless smile

What will people think?  
I've never seen anyone wear that?  
Anything else away from the path is wrong.  
My soul has never been mine

### *ALL THE COLOURS OF THE RAINBOW*

#### INTRODUCTION:

This chapter focuses on the different aspects of being part of the LGBTQ+ community. As a young member myself, it can be difficult to exist in our current world where overt and covert homophobia are prevalent. This is a collection of poetry that ranges from societal pressures to 'carefree' crushes; I personally believe that they are all beautiful commentaries on human nature. Being queer is an experience that seriously varies, so you should expect great highs and lows within the chapter. Poetry is an expression of the mind being carried out through the body, so read on and experience another perspective.

Best wishes,  
Emmanuella (Ella) Ikhifa

*Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

POEM NAME: ETHEREAL FEELINGS (WITHIN REASON)

Poet: Ella Ikhifa

There's a girl

Her beauty is beyond words.

Sometimes I think that, she is literally quite perfect in her face

Whenever my eyes meet her

The beating drum in my chest begins to chase itself

In a reckless and aimless fashion

Sometimes she visits my daydreams

And I can dream of picnics, museums, parks

All shared between us

Now, she's only a crush.

But wouldn't it be lovely

If a fantasy could become a reality

If I could learn to love someone

Almost as well as I've been learning to love myself

But, of course

It's nothing serious

Poem name: Control

Poet: Jennifer Sealy

PROMPT: "LIKE A WEED I GROW IN RESISTANCE"

I am not a rose nor even a daisy

My body is not perfect in shape

No one bothers to stop and admire

Nothing on this earth will change me

I've been forced to grow my roots deep

Every pluck of my leaves, will grow back

My stem remains firm in the ground

Healing will be slow  
Picking myself up out of the dirt  
Shaking off the cruel hurt

I've tried to grow into a flower  
A vibrant, golden, daisy  
But still my petals are sharp, refined and circular  
In this form I still cannot please

I've grown into a pappus  
A grey, puffy, shell  
Still I cause damage  
No one blames the wind for disturbing my peaceful slumber  
All daggers turn to me

MY FORM IS NOT THE PROBLEM

Poem name: Gay awakenings  
Poet: Ella Ikhifa

I think I have loved women my entire life

I never wanted to draw boys in primary school  
I always saw the female form as easier on the eyes  
I always wanted to be that one girl's 'friend' really badly  
I always thought that she was just really, really, really pretty

But then I also thought that  
Gay is fine, just not around me  
I can't possibly be gay, it's not even an option

How ironic.

But, of course men are still there too  
In the small corner of the picture with me  
And my multitude of wives

*Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

Poem name: Now's not the time

Poet: Ella Ikhifa

It may seem unbelievable  
But I am a real human being  
Who is simply discovering themselves

No  
I have not been influenced by the 'gay agenda'  
No  
I this is not a phase  
Yes  
It may be a sin  
But  
Who are you to judge  
Somebody out of your own jurisdiction

I'm not even Christian  
And yet I am policed, stereotyped, attacked

'It gets better'  
'The world is moving forward'  
'We're progressing'

But how long until it's over?  
Until the world is fully formed and ready to accept its faults?

How many more centuries of murder, and 'therapy', and  
abuse  
Will it take?

HOW MANY?

Poem name: I am

Poet: Noemi Akossokon

I am the dark; a shadow of what could have been,

*Creative Power*

my failures marred on my skin; uncomfortable, unsettled  
within.

The light she could be; healing the brands- the burdens of my  
sins.

While I fall; drowning in the constructs of society,  
She's blooming; rising defiantly.  
Silence speaks louder than words, and she is heard,  
every word inspires; transforms.

Barriers are broken,  
the norm, no longer normal.  
She is brave; she is bold and brilliant.  
And I aspire; I desire to have the courage,  
to have the flourish to not be complacent; to not be still.

To look inside, and not only survive, but thrive  
With the will to be greater than what I am.

But I am.  
With the will to look inside, to cross the great divide  
between what is and what can be.  
To gain the courage and pay homage  
To those who came before me.  
To stand on the shoulders of the brave, and the bold and the  
brilliant

And become so.

I can be she.  
And now I am her  
with the will to be whatever I want.  
I am.

I will to be the change I want to see in the world.  
I yearn for inspiration and transformation.  
Each step I take I learn,  
And I create a better place, for the light within.  
No longer am I the shadow of what could have been

*Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

But a reality of a glimmer of hope

I am.

Poem: Questioning

Poet: Ella Ikhifa

I am human

My body was born into the category: female

I associated myself with it for a long while

And clung to the label

As if when I let go, my very being would be flung into chaos

And when I finally did let go

The chaos was more of a calm storm

A hurricane that comes and goes

Leaving one destroyed building in need of repair

Whenever it disappears

I believe that the storm will eventually move on permanently

But until then,

I have to struggle with what it has thrown at me

'Genderfluid' 'non-binary' 'transgender' 'cisgender' 'agender'

Oh, and of course..

'Pronouns'

-As if sexuality wasn't hard enough

*PARKS*

Introduction:

Parks are a very much overlooked yet they are an integral part of human life. Parks are always there in the background of our childhood memories; it's the scene of our experiences as a child, the creator of many memories. They are where we got



hurt yet had fun, where we made new friends. Parks symbolize childhood joy. They symbolize mankind's connection with nature a gateway through to peace and tranquility.

Best wishes,  
Nesia Johnson-Pius

Poem name: 'The return to the park'  
Poet: Nesia Johnson-Pius

It was that time of day when the sun embraced the horizon, sending the sky into watercolour swirls. The trees hung on the edge of the field.

I tripped and fell to the ground, and as I did the smell of grass filled my senses. Yet, there was another smell: a smell of freshly baked goods from a sweet old lady's home. It reminded me of the warmth of an open oven, the embrace you feel as that heat clings to your skin. I looked up and lying there was a handwoven basket of muffins. Glancing around in confusion, I reached out, birds sung out a warning into the open sky and the trees whispered in alarm.

The sky darkened as little flecks of stars appeared; it crowded the crescent moon. The shadows thickened and reached out towards a figure appearing under the oak tree. The faceless figure did not conform to the dimensions of this world, its limbs merged and contorted, mixing with its surroundings. It was never fully there yet it was constantly present. I turned away in fear but then I heard it. The hauntingly beautiful hum of the lullaby. I drew my attention as the figure lulled me into a dreamlike state. Dazed and bewildered, I stood unaware of the impending danger I was in.

The swings of my childhood park creaked in the distance, asking me, calling to me, wondering why I had chosen to return. The laughter of children rang out, yet no one was there. Just me. The figure had disappeared, swept away by the wind and there on the ground lay the basket of muffins, rotten

*Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

and in crumbs. The chocolate oozed to the ground like pools of blood.

Poem name: 'I am yet to bloom'

Poet: Noemi Akossokon

I am yet to bloom,  
my life; a beginning and an end,  
my mark; the roots I left behind.  
I am yet to bloom,  
my history colour the petals I shield from the world;  
a cocoon of beauty - untapped, unkempt.  
I am yet to bloom,  
my heart covered in the thorns of the past,  
beating through the triumphs of today  
I am yet to bloom,  
my future renewed with every coming spring;  
a rebirth awaiting, washing away the sins of yesterday  
I am yet to bloom;  
Untapped, unkempt,  
Ripped away from the clutches of my sorrow  
I am yet to bloom.  
I have died before I have begun  
But the sun comes out tomorrow, and the day after.  
So, I am yet to bloom.  
History marks the struggles of the past,  
and guides the pathway to the future.  
I am to bloom  
I shall do so with the bearing of my forefathers  
And with the promise of the world before me  
I am yet to bloom  
But when I do, the world will know me and my fate.

Poem name: 'The Harshness of Reality'

Poet: Emmanuella (Ella) Ikhifa

The children danced and played in the park. They had lost every concept of the word 'time'; they had replaced what they once knew with something new. It was quite remarkable how

## *Creative Power*

they managed to forget their surroundings. They seemed to get the hint that they were fabricated. But, no bother. No problem arose here. The park was where they played and danced and sang and stayed. No need to shatter their experience. No point in driving them into reality and parking them there. The endless echoes of their laughter were enough to sustain themselves for now and forever. No end.

Poem name: Organisms

Poet: Emmanuella (Ella) Ikhifa

I saw murky and dark swamps filling up gaps in the ground. The air smelt like death and the trees piled up around me to look like skinny phantoms. Even the fog obscured my lenses as I travelled through this peculiar place. The atmosphere was enticing me further. The woods put me in a dark trance, as if I was a baby and the forest my milk. I crept closer and closer to a hole in the stump of a tree. It looked up at me with its wooden, patterned eyes. They would not let me go. I stepped inside of its iris with my mind. Grateful for the choice to implore this being further. It gave me a cold sense of warmth that travelled into my soul, slowly taking my essence away. But I tried to follow. My body and soul weren't meant to be together, but my mind forced the unnatural to be natural and yanked my being into the stump.

Poem name: A branches life (stream of consciousness)

Poet: Nesia Johnson-Pius

The branch lays on the ground, lonely and abandoned as the people pass by, walking their dogs and continuing on their journey through life. Pigeons fly overhead, squirrels climb over it as time continues yet it stays frozen on the ground, the cold ground. The seasons start to change, spring into summer into autumn into winter. The rain becomes sleet and leaves as they fall from their homes in the trees overhead and join you in solitude on the ground.

*Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

Then as the snow starts to settle around the branch, little hands pick it up from its resting place. They turn it over, inspecting and analyzing, then it is placed into a new home, one made of snow, a snowman. The ultimate symbol of childish delight, joy<sup>56</sup> and imagination. The branch has now found its place in a new home, having come from being part of one system to another. And there it stands happily ever after... or until the snow around it starts to melt.

Poem name: This was meant to be lighthearted

Poet: Emmanuella (Ella) Ikhifa

Parks are peaceful  
They give us the freedom  
To reflect on our lives  
They teach us to appreciate  
What we have  
We meditate on what will be  
What is currently being  
And what has been  
The nature brings us back down to earth  
When we are floating in the clouds  
Ready to leave the atmosphere  
And drown in the void we call space ...  
Parks are quite beautiful

Poem name: In the midst of chaos, comfort is found

Poet: Jennifer Sealy

Blankets of grey shielded the sky  
The rain was delicate but true to its nature  
It slyly began to dampen everything  
Blades of grass became welcoming homes  
Trees swayed passionately to the abstract music of the rain

The once bustling, busy, bashful park  
Inhaled deeply, grateful for the tranquility  
Nature reveled in the absence of humans

The wind swept aside this cosmic peace  
A whistling wave sprinted through the park  
Forcing branches to dance frantically  
The unforgiving rain pelted down  
It had overstayed its welcome upon the grass

A peculiar being was sitting on a bench  
Their head tilted up towards the sky  
Their cold face, dripping with rain  
A curious smile grew.

*KS3 COLLECTION OF FREEWRITING EXERCISES ON THE THEME  
OF 'PARKS'*

*1. 'GREENWICH PARK' BY PRECIOUS ANOSIKE*

I was at the park with my family and friends. We went to Greenwich Park to have a picnic. All the kids had gone off to play while the adults got lunch ready. All of them were playing football together. I heard them laughing and giggling. Me and my friends wandered off to a little forest. We sat down on a bench and did some random stuff. When we were finished, we went back to the picnic to find all the adults looking worried. I went to ask my mum what had happened. My brother had disappeared and they didn't know where he was. So, my friends and I went to look for him.

First off, we went back to the forest we came out of. Nothing. We went to the statue. Nothing. We looked everywhere. Nothing. Everyone was so worried. So, we decided to pack up everything and go home. The next day my friends and I went to look for him again. We couldn't find him so we had to get the police involved. Day 3 came and the police started investigating.

## *Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

On day 5, I just took a walk in the park and I SEE MY BROTHER TIED UP IN A CHAIR IN THE MIDDLE OF A FOREST. He saw me and started shaking his chair and everything. I went up to him and tried to untie him but then the kidnapper came. He wanted to grab me but luckily, I do karate. So, I kicked his jaw and he went flying to the floor. I was able to untie my brother and we ran out of there. I called mum and told her everything. She was so glad we were safe. I don't really know what happened to the guy I kicked but let's pray he doesn't kidnap anyone again with the kick I gave him. Everyone was glad to see him but something wasn't right. It looked like he had blood stains on his shirt. I asked him what had happened and he said...

### *2. 'THOUGHTS ON PARK' BY VANESSA APPIYAH*

When I first go to the park my vision is filled with trees: a sea of trees dressed in shades of light and dark green. I trail my eyes down the arms of the trees and I watch their leaves blow away. They feel upset because their leaves might fall on the floor and get trampled on. The colour of the veins is yellow and green. You can see people collecting leaves from the ground when it's Autumn. There are many types of trees: oak trees, pine trees, willow trees and more. There is also a tree which is poisonous it's called poison ivy. Poison ivy is very painful and itchy. It brings blistery rash all over the body, however we don't tend to have it a lot in the UK. Trees help us to breathe because they have O<sub>2</sub> in them.

Trees are the longest living organism on earth and never die of old age.

### *3. 'SKIN LEATHER' BY ORLAITH BIGGS*

Damp blades of grass flickered past my sodden feet, trekking idly past towering oaks. Their leaves stained a golden-crimson colour in the sun's rays.

I broke from the dense wood and vegetation surrounding myself and came to a clearing the size of a large wardrobe.

There within it lay a log, upon which at first glance seemed something which looked similar to rotting wood.

In fact, they were a pair of boots.

The edges blanketed with a bushy, verdant moss, the footwear was in abominable condition, one might say.

Crater-like holes had erupted from their faces, with additional dainty vines and sticks sprawled along the edges.

They were of a faded chestnut colour, with something reddish splotched here and there.

Just leaning my head forwards made me want to regurgitate my lunch, the odour was so rank with the stale scent of corpses.

I hastily plugged my nostrils, only to taste the scent seeping in through my front teeth and wrapping itself around my tongue.

It made me gag. I almost didn't want to look any further!

Almost.

Timidly reaching out an arm, I felt, with three of my fingers, the shoes' leathery exterior, gradually dipping my fingers into the mouth.

Something about the feel of the material was oddly similar to human skin.

Also, something sharp caught the edge of my fingernails; I felt it stick.

I slid my fingers down the insides, only to dip them into a pool of some sorts.

I snatched them out, swiftly, roughly.

A gooey, crimson sludge dripped from my fingertips.

Oh god.

An eerie, ringing noise filled my ears.

It was all so incredibly loud in that moment!

The blood soaking my skin, the fear went down to the bone.

I ran, as fast as I believed possible, as swiftly as my aching legs would carry me.

Home, home, home.

4. *'MY PARK SMILE' BY ELLA JASMINE BONDZIE*

It was Tuesday the 11th of August, and the sun was starting to rise. I was laying in the park chest down watching the world go by. There were buses, trains, people and birds. The birds were green and colourful and the bright red buses and the loud (honks) of the cars filled my senses.

As the morning sunlight hits the pushy pink soft blossoms they sparkle and shine. Each blossom opens like a book and each one tells a different story.

The coat was pale blue and the sky was forever changing with light. The blue sky brings music to my strides and brings joyfulness to my hands.

The grass was long and lush; the flowers that poked out smiling into my face and the colours that entered my eyes amazed me.

The park makes me happy. The environment smiles and the experience makes me feel alive.

5. *'GREENWICH PARK BLOSSOMS' BY JASMINE BUCKNOR*

It is very quiet and peaceful in the local park, with so many trees almost as if it is an endless forest. The birds sing and chirp their songs in their nests. As the rain falls on the park, the plants and trees get the nutrients they need to grow. The water drips off the leaves like a baby's tear: "drip..drop..drip..drop..."

When it stops, the wind is calm, like the breathing of a well-trained martial artist. It's rare that a strong gust of wind may blow through the park like blowing as hard as you can on your birthday cake's candles. On sunny days everything is peaceful and quiet. The smell of fresh herbs lingers in the air and tingles your nose as the wind sweeps by. You feel the natural grass clean your shoes as you walk, after the rain has cleared.

In spring the plants begin to sprout. The tree leaves begin to grow back and the brown, withered leaves that used to barely



hang on the trees have now been replaced with the lush, vivid green ones. The cherry blossoms sprout one by one, each revealing a beautiful pink. That is when I first sprouted, I was a proud pink cherry blossom. When the wind blows, we dance and wave around in an amazing manner.

People are very, very unappreciative. They always start to pick us off our branches one by one, which ruins our proud appearance. Especially the children; when a blossom falls to the ground, they trample all over us, pick us up and forget/leave us somewhere. Or, they pick us up and heartlessly rip us to pieces! They can't be forgiven. We cherry blossoms are the ones who add colour to your experience at the park, whether you're relaxing or having fun! I don't like this kind of disrespect towards my fellow blossoms. I do enjoy when the children play around singing their songs or laughing with each other or gossiping about things underneath the trees.

The park at night is awfully silent but I won't complain because we blossoms can finally have a break from the noise and look forward to another day of chatter and laughter. We can never predict how the day will be. Peaceful and quiet or loud and chaotic. The Park is always a good place to relieve stress and take a break from home or your office. Every day at Greenwich Park, something interesting happens and I think you would love to come and admire us cherry blossoms as well.

6. *'THE PLAYGROUND' BY KEISHA DODOO*

The playground is where I spend most of my days  
Relaxing or playing silly games,  
Monday is when we played tag  
And when we won, we always liked to brag  
Tuesday is football, girls v boys  
And when the girls lose, they would always be annoyed  
Wednesday we would go play tennis  
And the curly head boy is quite a menace

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Thursday, we loved to read our comics  
And finishing them was quite ironic  
Friday, we let off all our steam  
We have a nap and share our dreams.

*7. AN EXTRACT FROM MALIKA GLEN'S 'GREENWICH PARK' MYSTERY  
STORY*

The thoughts ran wild as I trudged through the mud in my shoes. I stopped to look where I was and to take a deep breath. I looked around, taking in all the wonders of the earth, the emerald trees glistened under the sunlight that was peeking out of the clouds. It Wasn't the best day to go into a park but I needed to clear my head. The soft chirps of a bird perched up on the tree soothed me as I was deep in thought. I continued; the atmosphere dropped with each given step I took. The air was thin on the mountain and the amount of oxygen up here was scarce. The taste of fear lingered in my saliva as I swallowed hard. I looked back and heard a twig snap in half. Someone followed me. I knew it from the time I was halfway up the mountain.

Then out of nowhere a horrendous odour lingered near me. My nose twitched as I inhaled the stench. I looked to my left then to my right. I followed the smell until I came across a shoe. A weird looking shoe. It looked no bigger than a size 5. I put on my plastic, black glove and took a closer look at it. It was covered in lots of flowers; I could tell that it had been worn out from the time it was here. The laces were muddy and no longer the usual white. As I continued to inspect my findings I felt as if I was not alone. There was something weird about this area. I could feel it. The same feeling settled in my stomach like a parasite not wanting to let go. I clenched my chest. Then I heard a voice from a little girl no older than four or five saying: "don't touch my shoe it's mine my mother gave it to me!" She repeated this line 10 times more and with each given line it got angrier and angrier, louder and louder. I looked around

me frantically, shoes still in my hand, expecting to see the girl. She was nowhere to be found. My thoughts run wild. As I got to my feet it was almost as if it had no bones to stabilise it anymore. I fell back into the ground. My legs were practically Jelly I could not feel them, where had the voice come from? What? Where? I could not think straight anymore. My breaths became sharp out of fear, my eyes started to close slowly and before I knew it all I saw was pitch black.

Greenwich Park is one of the most visited places in London. I am a detective/tourist and I have never seen such beauty in my 47 years on earth. Anyways, enough about that, I haven't even introduced myself properly. I am detective Montgomery Montgomery (I know I know, yes, my first and second name are exactly the same. Lazy parents I know right! But that's not important!) I was pronounced lead detective in the case of Elizabeth Taylor, a young girl who was sadly taken away from her parents on the tragic night of December 21st. Her family were taking a walk throughout Greenwich Park and all the lights began to flicker. They said they were holding her close but yet she was still swept out of their arms they said it was almost the work of a ghost but that was impossible right? But she was taken away and has not been found ever since. It's been two weeks since her disappearance so the police finally decided that they would start an investigation into this. They gave me a picture of her as such a sweet young girl. She had big bright blue eyes and freckles sitting on her face like little stars. I could understand how her parents must feel after losing such a child. Anyways now that the introduction is finished let me tell you what I saw...

*8. ENVIRONMENTAL WARRIORS BY BY MALIKA GLEN*

Look with your eyes,  
Through the government's lies  
About single use plastic  
And where the blame truly lies

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I don't want to hear your cries  
On how you can do better  
When all you're going to do,  
Is write a stupid letter  
A letter to the council  
Or maybe even the news  
But you will never understand  
The true level of plastic abuse.

There is plastic in the ocean but you don't think it's a  
commotion  
That's why you choose to do nothing instead of bringing forth  
a motion  
To clean the ocean  
One day at a time no one said  
It was a crime, yet you choose to do nothing  
Every single day, but if you throw one  
Piece of plastic  
You'll jump and scream hooray

The forests are still on fire  
You can call me a liar  
But tell that to the animals  
Who run with such dire  
The fire started because of us  
Because we wanted new AirPods  
Or new seats on the bus  
But for this price the animals will pay  
Whilst we make the same mistake  
To this very day  
That is all I have to say.

*9. 'THE MAN IN THE WOODS!' BY CATHERINE HARDAKER*

'Beep beep beep' I smacked the button on the top of my old  
rustic alarm clock, my feet touched the floor as I got out of  
my bed. I stood up; a big sigh of depression crawled out my  
mouth. I wearily went down the stairwell, grabbed an out-of-

date yoghurt, and spooned it into my mouth as fast as I could (when I realised it was 7:00 already). I jumped into my grey blazer and my long navy-blue skirt. I walked to my bus stop on Grandiose Drive and took the plain green bus to my torture chamber (school).

*IN MATHS:*

I heard whispering behind me; eavesdropping I heard the girls saying "...woah, your brother really went to the Black woods?! That's crazy, I heard a story about it. Apparently, there's a man who lives there that kills boys and girls for fun. I think he has killed about 15 no.. 16.. yeah probably 16, slaughtering and slaughtering always waiting for its next.. VICTIM."

Laughter chuckled through the classroom, soon the teacher interrupted saying "detention Danielle and Stacy for starting your little party arrangement."

I was shocked, why? Why my woods? The woods I grew up in. It couldn't be true, no it can't! Weirdly they started talking about me, "wait doesn't Katie live right next to it, so creepy."

I ran home after school so fast after finding out these things about my great black woods.

I burst into the kitchen sweaty, tired, sad, and out of breath.

I say to my mum "is it true, is it true?"

My mum replies back, "huh what, what are you talking about?!"

"The story about the man in the black woods who killed 16 people!!"

"Uhh, I don't think so.. Katie, sweetie is you ok?"

"Yup, totally, yes, anyways got to go love you mum!!"

So, I thought if nobody would tell me I'd find out myself.

I sneaked into the dark black woods trying not to make a sound. Soon I heard something. I ran, faster than ever, and soon I tripped over a small stone that clung to the ground, it was pitched black.

My eyes fluttered open staring at everything around me, 'what, where am I?' I stood up, I tried to move but I was attached to something, it was roots, small roots. A small brown rustic box stood in front of me, my hands reached down towards it

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picking it up. I flicked up the small latch stuck onto the box. It slowly opened revealing a dead decapitated hand; I threw it down hard. I heard a slight creak coming from behind me wait, there were twelve individual boxes stood, no it was the man from Danielle and Stacy's story. I looked behind me a tall man stood behind me an axe in his hand clutched over his head swoosh.

The axe smashed my neck in two decapitating me, dead. The man ripped off my arm and stuffed it into the sixth box in the circle. That was it, I was dead. Dead from a true rumour at school. That was the story of my untimely and sad death in the black woods, by that man in those disturbing woods.

The End

*10. 'THE MAJESTIC GREENWICH PARK' BY AMANDA JABLONSKA*

The pink blossoms slowly slither throughout the light. Cold wind and the cherry-blossom trees swiftly blow along with the breeze. The beauty of the soft rose petals put shame upon the dull, ruby and maroon leaves on the trees that are planted into the hideous, brown bark supporting the flow of the boring atmosphere.

The small concrete paths are walked on by the dazzled people going for walks and picnics. The vile shameless trash cans cover the heavenly appreciative flower's scent with their nasty, smelly, foul stench and empty cups, rotten half eaten foods.

The graceful daisies and tulips sit on the colourful flower beds, flowing and dancing along with the light wind. The colour and beauty attracts humble bees, ready to pollinate, and make more, and fly away swiftly into their hives.

This is the majestic Greenwich Park.

I have observed something magical today.

*11. 'VOICES IN THE PARK' BY ELIZABETH JAIYESIMI*

First voice

It was time to take my Golden Retriever, Bailey, to the park for the day. As we arrived there, I removed Bailey's lead from around her neck and as soon as I did, she sprinted away from me. I chuckled as I saw her playing with some other dogs. I walked around the park eager to see the new plants that were planted a few days ago. I strolled around as I admired the beautiful colours of flowers and trees. The scenery in front of me was so ravishing and heavenly that I just wanted to stay there for the rest of my life.

After a while, I checked the time and realised that we had been in the park for more than an hour. I soon bumped into a kind looking man and he introduced himself as Caleb.

#### Second voice

I had just arrived from work and saw my pug, Biscuit, looking at me with his large eyes.

"Alright, alright! I'll take you for a walk in the park." I said to him laughing

After we arrived at the park, I let Biscuit off his leash while he walked up to some other dogs like he's known them forever. I sat down and read my newspaper; I carefully examined each story fully before turning the page. After a short time, my newspaper had no more pages to be read. I carefully put it down beside me not knowing what else to do. I looked around the park in amazement, 'How had I not noticed how big and pulchritudinous the park was. Ah new word, Pul-chri-tu-dinous' I thought, spelling out my new word on the back of the newspaper. I stood up, newspaper in hand, exploring the enchanted park that I never dared to examine until now. I was so focused I didn't realise I had bumped into a man who told me his name was Mike and soon enough we met a lady called Angela.

#### Third voice

I waited until five o'clock in the afternoon to take Chip, my sausage dog, to the park for his daily walk. \*DiNg\* the clock shouted as it hit 5. Chip knew it was time to go back to his favourite place on earth. I wore a pair of fluffy boots and a brown jacket to match. As we stepped outside, the sun shone

like a thousand stars in the night sky. As we entered through the gate of the park, I removed Chip's leash as his little legs hurried over to a group of dogs barking together like they were having a conversation. I giggled at the sight. I strolled around the park watching the flowers gracefully swaying in the wind and the gentle breeze brushing against the leaves of the trees. The park was a very calm place just to stride around and watch the greenery dance in the breath of the wind. I had introduced myself to two men whose names were Caleb and Mike. We sat down together talking about our dogs and how much of a handful each one was. We soon realised that all our dogs and some other dogs were playing together like best friends.

Author's voice

Suddenly everything went silent. Nothing moved. It was like something had just hit pause on the world. Everything was still, except the dogs...

"For years we have been the animals that cannot do anything for themselves. Always relying on humans to keep them alive!"

A cocker spaniel announced.

"We need to learn how to take care of ourselves!" Bailey barked walking beside the cocker spaniel

"Humans do not treat us dogs how we should be treated. We should be respected!" Biscuit shouted, marching proudly to the other side of the cocker spaniel.

"We shall not be less worthy or more useless than those dirty cats!" Chip yapped walking in front of the three.

"Yeahhhhhhhh" The rest of the dogs shouted enthusiastically.

Soon enough they all went on a rampage. But little did they know someone was watching over them and everyone else in the park for a long amount of time. They were lying on the roof of a house observing everyone like a hawk. Lola, a cat, had not been frozen because she was an animal. Yet she had overheard the dog's conversation and thought they were all pathetic for doing this just because of dominion. But she didn't care, it wasn't her business whatsoever...



12. *'TWISTED TREASURES' BY FATIMA KUYATEH*

The emerald trees swayed with the wind as the grass glimmered while the sun's light shone upon it. The autumn leaves tumbled onto the dampened ground. Birds sang lovely songs and on the other side of the park obstreperous children laughed and played with their friends and family. It is always so joyful and ecstatic. The view is extraordinary from here. I was walking through the bushes excited to find something new when I heard a sound in the distance. It appeared to be coming from the flower bed nearby. I went to explore what it was; my parents always said I would be a good detective. I searched and searched but found nothing. I needed to investigate it. I couldn't have been the wind, I thought to myself bewildered.

Just then I heard the leaves rustle. I'm not alone but at the same time... I was. I looked around, baffled. What could be making all of that noise? I went to one of the local neighbours in the neighbourhood and asked them if there had been any suspicious activity recently. Well, there have been many reports of theft and stolen products and some people have even disappeared.

As I reached for my phone to take notes there was nothing there! It had been stolen whilst I had been oblivious to my surroundings in the forest. What kind of maniac would do that?!

I went to my office and ordered my co-workers to find out more information on this case while I did some tests. I hope they find something interesting to help.

13. *'THE SHOE' BY LAURA MAKOSSO-MCINTOSH*

I blinked, shaking my head groggily. My eyes were swimming, and I could see a blur of green, blue and yellow. Where the hell was I? I groaned and rolled over, wishing that I didn't drink so much last night. It felt like there were little workers drilling

holes into my head. Small things like bark began to scratch my face, and my nose picked up a damp smell.

I bolted straight up, unaware of my surroundings. I began to fear what would happen to me. Had I been kidnapped? Was I going to die? Fear clouded my mind. I began to rub my eyes and look around for clues about why I was here.

The first thing I noticed was a shoe. A shoe. A high-heeled, red shoe. Just sitting in the grass. I felt drops of rain on my hair, but as I turned my head to look up, I found that I couldn't. I found that my eyes were stuck, no, glued to the shoe in front of me.

It seemed to whisper in my head, daring me to come closer, and to touch it. My mind was telling me to run, but my feet had a will of their own, and my body began to move towards it. I felt lifeless. A single tear slid down my cheek. When I got to the shoe, I knelt down. The urge to look inside was too strong, so strong that I couldn't resist it. I held my hands out slowly, shaking ever-so slightly. More salty tears slid down my face. I didn't understand why I was so scared. It was only a shoe . . . right?

So, I looked inside. There were dead leaves and some dirt, what you would think to find in a shoe in the middle of Greenwich Park. I couldn't figure out what I had expected from it, they way my hands were shaking. My body seemed finally free of the spell it was in, and I was able to move again. I laughed, wiping off my tears. This would certainly be something that I had to tell my friends. I started to walk away. But then

IT  
sucked  
me  
In.

*14. A FEW EXTRACTS FROM ALICE MARKIEWICZ'S JOURNAL OF IMAGINATION.*

I was driving with my aunty to the park. A couple minutes later we got to the park before I got out of the car. I put my gloves

on as it was still covid times then I got out of the car and I ran free. After 3 whole days of rain, I was finely free. Then a baby fox caught my eye and it was trapped in a snare. I took it out and put it down and it ran straight to its hole. I was very happy. I ran like the wind until I was lost. I saw a small house so I knocked on the door but no one answered. I sat on a rock that was actually comfy, then, THUD. I screamed; the sound came from a book that had landed in front of me. When I picked it up some sort of power ran through my veins, I turned into some sort of queen. I put the book into my bag and I finally found my way back to the car.

At home

I ran into my room and started to read the strange book, then I heard footsteps, I hid the book under my pillow and leaped into my desk chair and pretended to do my homework. The door opened and my mum came into the room but she looked very angry. She sat on the armchair that was on the other side of the room and said "Why are these weird polish people asking for my child's signature," she stood up rustled my hair and kissed me (YUCK). At around 2:00 pm straight after lunch my mum and I went out to the park again, but this time we had to walk (uhhh I hate walking). Once we got there my mum was on the phone as usual so I went to the same place where I found the book.

The shoe.

I sat on the same rock that I sat on before and I was stroking a little bird's chin. I looked forward and saw a shiny, red high heel. Without thinking, I put the heel on, my eyes flashed red. I took off the heels and put them in my bag. I ran to my mum as it was getting dark. She said that she was feeling generous and as I was a good girl so she would take me to an excellent restaurant that was on the other side of the park. I asked if we could have a race and she agreed. We ran up and down hills until we were panting; we stopped to catch our breath and 10 seconds later my eyes flashed emerald green and me and my mum were perfectly fine. It was only till we got to the restaurant that I had powers. I ordered dumplings with cheese

and potato and apple juice with ice (YUM) and for dessert I got to have cheesecake with chocolate ice cream.

4 Years later

When I was 18, I was captured by 4 men they said they would kill me if I called the police. What they didn't know was that the shoes I was wearing were the ones that could have saved my life and I had the book in my bag. I screamed so they gave me this powder that would make me sleepy but my eyes flashed green and I didn't fall asleep. They tried strangling me and once again my eyes flashed green and I didn't die. So, they tied me to a very uncomfortable chair. My eyes flashed red and I was free then I got angry so I whispered a spell that will call all kinds of deadly creatures and protect me and all the deadly animals came to me and protected me. I finally found my way out of this dreaded place and I found myself in the park where I found the book and the shoe. I was in the little house in the park.

My mythical creature

I was at school and we were supposed to make a mythical creature so I made a mix of a human, piranha, lion and an inland taipan (the most venomous snake in the world). After 3 to 4 days of work I was finished and mine was the best in the class. When I came home, I showed it to my family and they were amazed, even my baby cousin. I went to the park and my eyes flashed purple and my mythical creature came alive, then my eyes flashed blue and they were all around the world and they were on the news. Even David Attenborough didn't know what it was but it was the most dangerous animal ever. Luckily it didn't harm people as it mostly lived in water.  
THE END

*15. A COLLECTION OF SHORT EXTRACTS AND OVERVIEW OF ALICE  
MARKIEWICZ'S STORY 'THE LIFE OF A WEREWOLF'*

Chapter 1: Me

Hello, I'm Mary, daughter of King Henry VII but I have a secret. I am a werewolf every full moon. When the owl strikes one, POOF...I'm not human...

“WAKE UP MARY!”

“What is it Suzana”

“Wake up NOW”

“Fine,” I say, trying to open my eyes slowly. I see Madame Fazim whipping Suzana,

“STOP hitting Suzana you bully”, I shout to the old, rusted woman.

...

I carefully step out of bed minding our little Bonny, our dog who loves sleeping right next to my bed. I get out onto the corridor and shout, “Beheader, come here now.”

“Yes, madam you called me”, said the masked man that came to me.

I asked him kindly to dispose of the caretaker that whipped Suzana.

...

After breakfast, we all went for a walk in the enchanted forest; little Bonny and Princess were in front of us to protect us from anything because we were only 12. Then suddenly Suzana disappeared and was nowhere to be seen.

I called out her name. Then something grabbed my back. I said “Suzana?”

I scream it was not Suzana it... it... it was a m- m- ma- man.

I had enough time to write a help letter to father and put it in little Bonny's collar. Bonny ran all the way home and all the way to the throne and handed it to father so he could instruct his guards to go looking for me.

*16. A ‘PARK MYSTERY BOX’ SHORT STORY BY ZAINA MBOLI-KALWELE*

After an extremely long car ride, I was so happy that we had finally arrived and that we could get out of this cramped, stinky, and sweaty car so we could stretch our legs. Once we got out, I took a long intense stretch and slowly walked toward the crispy, malnourished, tiny yellow and green gate. As I pushed it open it creaked so loud that no other noise could be heard. I took a step, and I had now entered Danson Park. Today is a sunny day, it is almost 25 degrees. I am

wearing a short-sleeved shirt along with some bright blue shorts. Around me, I am surrounded by what feels like millions and millions of dark green trees. Then below those trees are little, brightly coloured flowers. All the trees and the plants sway in union in the ever so light breeze. As I take a deep breath in and discard all the noise, I take a moment to take in all the different aromas. All these different sounds and smells fill me with delight. I walk around a bit until I am finally able to spot my friends in the little playground swinging on the swings. I run up to them so I can go join them. It didn't even take me a minute but after a few swings I was able to see something in the distance. I don't know what it is but If I want to know the only way is to get closer to it so I can see it better. I get off the swing and exit the playground. All my friends are calling my name.

“Zaina, Zaina!”

They try to figure out what I am doing and try to get me to come back.

“Where are you going?”

“What are you doing?”

The further away I walk the more the sounds fade away.

A few of them try to run after me and drag me back but all I do is push them away.

The closer and closer I walk the more my heart beats. Doom, Doom, Doom, Doom.

The mysterious object is only a few meters away, I told myself. I walk closer and closer. When finally, the object was only a few steps away. A strong scent filled my nose. It was like rotten eggs, mixed with dog poop, mixed with a garbage can, mixed with all the worst scents you could imagine. My nose hairs spring up the highest they ever have been. My face squished together. I was starting to second guess my decision. If I don't know what the object is and how it will affect me.

What happens if the box belongs to someone, and they track me down and haunt me for the rest of my life because I took

their stuff? Wait no, this is all so silly none of this will ever happen, I tell myself.

Once I finally arrived, I took a closer look at it; it looked like a normal box. I dusted it off and moved away all the leaves covering it. When I went to pick it up, I could see some writing engraved into it. I had to squint my eyes to read it properly but when I was able to read it.

It said, 'Do not open until the 5th of June 2022'. I began shaking because I was quite sure that today was that exact date. I did not want to get ahead of myself, so I went to pull out my phone from the back pocket of my shorts. My mouth dropped to what felt like the floor. Under the time on my lock screen, it said, '5th of June 2022.'

Had I just found a time capsule? Is it a coincidence that I just happened to find it on the day that it was supposed to be opened? That does not matter. I picked it up but dropped it straight away. The box was so heavy. I would not be able to bring this all the way to the car by myself, so I needed help. I pulled out my phone again and texted my friends to come over to where I was standing. They came within seconds. I explained to them everything, and they were as shocked as me. We all agreed that whatever was inside I would get 90 percent of it, and I could give away 10 percent of the things that were left after I had chosen my things. On the count of three, we lifted up the box. As we did it, we heaved and grunted and wheezed.

We brought it to a clear patch of green in the middle of the park. Once we got there, we dropped the box, and it made a big THUMP! We all fell to the ground and laid there for a good minute before getting back up again. We circled the box and they said I could do the honours. I tried to open it but then I realized that we had another problem to deal with. There was a padlock on the box. We were all so annoyed and 2 of my friends ran back to where I found the box assuming the key could be there, but they had no luck searching there.

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We tried to think of different places we could find the key but about when we were going to run out of hope another one of my friends noticed something on the back of the box. She picked it up from the box, and we realized that it was a piece of paper. Perhaps it would lead us to where the key was?

The note read:

'To the people of the future, I have left you this box with lots of my prized possessions, but I shall not tell you what is inside of my box you will have to figure it out yourself. I have left you four notes. This being one of them. You are to read my instructions and figure out how to open my box. To find the second note you must travel to the far east side of the park near to the lake. Just on the edge of the lake you shall find your next set of instructions.'

Good Luck,  
Sir Benjamin Disraeli

We were all up for the challenge. We decided that we were all going to take turns looking after the box, so no one else could take it. Two of us went to the east side of the park and I was one of them. It only took us a couple of minutes to find it was underneath an old gnome. Once we had it, we ran back to the rest of the group and read it together.

The note read:

'To the people of the future, you have found it congratulations I hope it was not too hard. To find your next clue you must travel to the west side of the park, for this you must climb the oak tree and look very, very carefully at the little cracks and nudges.'

Good Luck,  
Sir Benjamin Disraeli

No of us were really looking forward to it but we decided that for the sake of the box and the team we could just suck it up and do it. Two of the girls went to the east side and they were



there for a long time, but they came back with the note. So, whilst I read the note they listened and at the same time they were cleaning themselves up and tried to get the splinters out.

This note read:

‘To the people of the future, sorry I know this note was extremely hard to get but do not worry you shall soon be rewarded you just have 1 more note to get before you find the key to my hidden mystery. For this you must travel to the west side of the park, and you need to dig. I suggest you get some shovels. You will find a tree engraved with strange designs on it. You are to dig on the left side of it and there you will find your 4th and final note.’

Good Luck,  
Sir Benjamin Disraeli

Again, 2 of us headed off but first we had to get some shovels. Once we had everything, we began to dig. Maybe because there were two of us or maybe because the note hadn’t been buried very deeply. We were back within a couple of minutes. We were so excited because we were so close to unboxing the mystery. I then opened the final note. It read, ‘To the people of the future, when you find out where the key is you might be a bit annoyed but don’t worry because like I said you shall be rewarded. Now, for the last task I need you to use all your strength and turn the box upside down.’

Good Luck,  
Sir Benjamin Disraeli

We were all so confused but we just did as we were told. As soon as we had turned it over. Our mouths dropped again. All this time the key was right next to use. I pulled the key off the box and used it to open the padlock. As I opened it. Our mouths dropped again just one more time. Standing before us was GOLD. I am pretty sure it was real too. No wonder it was so heavy. Who was this man that he was so rich? We all

screamed in joy because we were now rich. Eight 12-year-olds, now maybe multi-millionaires. I pulled out my phone and searched up the name: Benjamin Disraeli and this is what came up...

Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881) British Prime minister and close friend to Queen Victoria.

That's all we needed for it to make sense to us.

*17. A COLLECTION OF SHORT EXTRACTS FROM A NOVEL ZAINA MBOLI-KALWELE IS WORKING ON, TITLED 'THERE IS A NEW KID ON THE BLOCK'*

Chapter 1

Today was the opening of a new beginning. The 16th of May 2022. A bright orange and green moving van pulled up right in front of my house and following it was a bright yellow minivan and out came a family of 5. From what it looked like it seemed as though they were your typical type of Caucasian family. There was a dad, mum, sister, brother, and another sister. They got out the car and started telling the moving people where to put everything, I knew they would be here for a couple of hours and then they would leave, and the family would have time to settle in. After they had finished, and the van left, me and my mum went over to go and welcome them to the neighborhood along with some other kids and their parents who had the same idea. The door opened and an unpleasant girl with tracksuits and greased blonde hair greeted us with a lovey, "Who the f is youse lot!?"

My mum told her we were their new neighbors and was just welcoming them. She looked like she thought that she had better things to do so she rolled her eyes and slammed the door in our faces, and then followed a big "BANG!"

A few seconds later the door opened again and from what I understood it was her mum, and she said, "I am so sorry about

my daughter Courtney she can be a real pain sometimes and she doesn't really like interaction that much, especially with people that she doesn't know."

Maria's mum, my best friend's mum, told her that "We are your new neighbors and that we were just welcoming you to the neighborhood." She responded with a lovely "OH, why thank you, you are all extremely sweet to take you time and come say hello, my name is Susan, and my husband here is called Daniel; I also have two other children Katie who is 19 and Jacob who is 8 and of course you have met Courtney, she is 13. I am apologizing now because Courtney can be a handful at times, and I am going to make sure that she does not do anything that should affect any of you guys. Its lovely to meet you all."

## Chapter 2

I think Courtney has now had a taste of what it is like in juvey because these last couple of weeks she has been on her best behaviour. I don't know how but somehow, she managed to get a place in our local school which is like crazy! I know that school still has empty places for if we students that come in later in the year for whatever reason, but I cannot believe they accepted a juvenile like Courtney. Like are they crazy?! Since she joined it has been chaotic, she has made some friends but the people she hangs out with were already troublemakers, but they were not as bad as her, like Courtney, is NEXT LEVEL. These are just a few things she has been doing since she got here:

Constantly setting off the fire alarms when she has a lesson she does not like (every lesson)

Always disrupting the lessons

Playing pranks on the teachers (last week she put gorilla glue on Mr Edwards chair)

Always pushing past people like she is some sort of boss or something (Like chillax your only in year 7)

The list could go on and on, but I do not want to bore you. Anyway, back to the story...

18. "The boy from Greenwich with mysterious shoes" by Yanichel Ocansey

I just finished School and I as went through Greenwich Park I stepped on something hard and not normal. It was an old mouldy spoilt shoes. If I could describe it, I would say it was really old and it looks like something that would have been from the 1980s or something. It was green and black and it looked like it was going to turn into a tree. My guess is that a boy had finished school and he had PE and maybe he was throwing his bag around and they fell out. Poor boy. I wonder how he would feel. I would be so sad because my family and I probably had to use a lot of money to get those shoes; I know that some trainers are expensive. Well, I had to go home because I was going to be late. Hopefully I will be able to see them again.

19. "PARK PROJECT IN PARTNERSHIP WITH GOLDSMITHS, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON" BY TSZ WAI PANG

Greenwich Park is a fascinating place to jog in. It is a home for animals and where people go to relax. People are always having fun in there. Some do exercise there. There are also a huge Variety of plants, such as flowers. They created a colourful and dreamy place. There are also different kinds of trees for you to study, grasses that you can lay on and release stress. While jogging, you will discover the stunning view of Greenwich Park. You can see the normal life of citizens in London. Explore the little things that happened to people in their daily life. After a while, you will see rows and rows of cherry blossom trees; they are very popular for being one of the most impressive attractions in Greenwich Park. People are always very intoxicated when they pass by that astounding view. Every spring time, they would cause a crowd surrounding the trees as they formed a lavish landscape. It would be a fantastic place to go for a walk and to take a selfie with friends. From the park you can always see families enjoying their time with each other. I once saw a brown-

haired man with his little baby. At first, the baby was crying but after he saw those wonderful and gorgeous flowers, he stopped and smiled. It looked like they were both enjoying the view of the flowers and trees. Not only the beautiful view of plants but also the joyous smile of their faces will warm your heart. The soft wind blows but you will never feel cold as you are with each other. Looking at this wonderful scene, suddenly a warmth spread from my eyes and to my heart, it seemed to cure all of the stress that I had before and relax me. Maybe it was a true feeling from a family or the excitement of seeing the view, but I will never know. As the wind blows, cherry blossoms fall down like snow and it creates a scene which is as classy as a picture-postcard, words can't even describe it perfectly. It was like a wonderland. You should go there and jog too. It would be a great idea.

20. *"GLIMMER & GRIME" BY WURAOLA SHITTA*

It was late at night in the park and darkness nipped at the illuminated moon. What was left of it shimmered around the floor as if searching for an escaping prisoner. Its light reflected off my Blood red skirt. The sequins along the hem emit their own source of light. My heels wobbled beneath me on the unsteady muddy base that is to be called a pavement. The footsteps behind me louder than ever yet I take no notice.

I let the intoxicating wine play around with my senses I minute too long. I can smell his cologne, Carine Roitfeld, Vladimir. What can I say? He has amazing taste. I regain control of my senses. My heartbeat is louder than a djembe drum but can only ever be heard by me. I plant my feet into the muddy ground 73 more steps to go. I could run, I should run but I can barely keep upright. The heel cap digs deep inside the earth.

"Don't go out," they said, "you'll regret it," they said. Yet the only thing I regret is wearing these stupid red stilts.

I heard the sound of a gun clicking behind me and someone rummaging around in their pockets an unopened envelope and some scrap paper There it is the silencer. I felt like I wanted

to vomit. I spun to see a simple silhouette. I could barely make out what gun it was but I settled on either the Steyr M1912 or Colt M1911. Both are very experienced in this field of work. "Don't make this hard for yourself just tell me where it is." Now this could work in one of 3 ways, I tell them, I play dumb or I die. I just carried on walking. BIG MISTAKE.

A gun was raised but not at my head, he was shooting to disable. I fell and he took the opportunity. He rushed forward and pinned me to the ground, and I lay motionless on the soft mud that clung to my face like a suction cup. "Now If you don't tell me what I need to know I'll have no use for you anymore." The words are like a caught record player in my head repeating the sound again and again each time louder and louder each time having a stronger impact. I can feel my head thumping.

I kicked off my heel as my feet were swollen so much so it looked like I had athletes' foot "I would rather Die" I said in response.

"So be it," he replied without another thought

He searched me before he raised the gun. "She doesn't have it," he said into his earpiece.

"Well kill her then!" a voice screamed through the earpiece, "she knows too much." It was my brother; my mentally disabled brother looking for the USB with all dad's money on it. I wouldn't have died any other way, lonely, confused and drunk.

#### 21. "TRICKED" BY KIERRA WINCHESTER

My name is Olive Wintinburg, I am the CEO of Wintinburg corporation. I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth so that gives you a bit of information about my family background.

Story

As usual I was walking around Greenwich Park, while I was making my way to work.

Currently the time was 6pm, the shade of the sky had drastically changed to a dark sunset. It looked like a painting. As I wandered around, I felt the shadows of the towering trees

block out the sunlight from hitting my face. I could hear the birds sing in harmony, while they soared over my head. Underneath my feet the snapping of a twig was heard which made me jump to surprise. Due to this my heart skipped a beat. Not so long after I could taste the coldness enter my mouth. In the distance, a peculiar, prodigious tree blocked my path. Although, a scarlet red shoe shimmered in my eyes. I thought I had been quite familiar with the shoe. Suddenly it hit me. About a month ago, I had experienced a situation where I happened to lose my priceless shoe while running away from a dog and some random men. As soon as I remembered, I grabbed the shoe (which was inside the tree) and began to make my way to the exit only to notice it was gone....

Unfortunately, I had seemed to have travelled to some sort of mysterious place. I turned around only to witness a family of bats heading my way, strange enough they seemed to have been chanting the words "return the shoe and we will give you a clue." Staring at them I noticed little guns on their body. Not thinking twice, I ran like I had never ran before. I came across another strange tree and without stopping I leaped inside.

As I cautiously stepped outside, I looked up only to see the words Spider Realm spelled out in cobwebs. Unknowingly, the tree disappeared ..... I was out in the open in a dark plain room. I felt chills freeze my spine. I walked with the shoe, positioning it as a weapon ready to fight any spider. Whispering in the distance was heard. The noise rate increased as I approached the whispers. Hoping I would find a human stuck here so I shouted out "Hey!" ..... A minute passed by and I received no reply. The whispers faded. A suspicious feeling crawled all over my body. Slowly, I turned around and to my surprise I was face to face with the biggest spider I had ever seen. The two of us remained in eye contact as I retreated my steps. However, the more I disappeared into the darkness the closer the spider approached me. Deciding to break the stare first, again I ran like I had never before. Looking for another tree to exit the realm while being chased by a spider, I was in luck for the first time today.

Finally exiting the first tree I had ever come across. I felt relieved. Again, wandering through the luscious park, I became aware of my surroundings. The celestial cherry blossoms walked by my side. This was because of the blustery wind lifting the flowers off the ground and right next to me. The scenic park and the navy-blue sky made me realise that I was gone for a while. Not so far away I noticed a lost puppy. Quickly, I dashed towards it. It seemed to be interested in a nearby bush. As I made my way behind the bush, I realised that a bizarre smell had entered my nose. Searching for the smell I stepped on something. Leisurely, I looked down only to discern a dead body.

“That is how I ended up here!” I complained to the police.

“You expect me to believe that you entered a spider realm and ran away from a family of bats that were carrying little guns?” A police officer questioned trying to identify if I was lying or not.

“You forgot to mention the part when they were speaking!” I lashed back.

“All right then, so say if you were in this strange world, how did the girl die?” Another man questioned.

“I don’t know, I bet it was the dog.” I stated

“Case closed, let’s throw her in jail.” The first officer stated, looking fed up with this situation.

“NO, YOU MAY NOT!” I screamed as a response. “That dog was part of a plan to get me kidnapped 2 weeks ago and suddenly you guys are going to throw me in instead of the real culprit!” I exclaimed huffing and puffing out of breath.

The next thing I knew I was in court. There were the prosecutors who seemed to be really good and my lawyer was absolutely useless. All I remember the judge saying was “Accused Miss Olive Wittinburg. Tampering with evidence, lying to a federal agent and murder. You are sentenced to life imprisonment.” Gosh I’m so sick of that guy. That’s the end of my story of how I got here. I had finished explaining my story to my cellmate. “I’m so sick of it here, just one day I will escape.” I stated, trying to think of a plan.

Well as SpongeBob said “If you can’t do the time, don’t do the crime.” My cellmate quoted.



This is the true story of how I got tricked by a dog and its owner... twice. It turns out they wanted to get revenge at me so..... I WAS FRAMED.

*22. "UNNAMED SHORT STORY" BY ASIA TERRAZZANO*

The sky was dark, gloomy, burning, vibrant and cloudy. It seemed that it was going to rain soon, so I started to run faster to get to a shelter so that I would not get wet. Luck was not on my side and while I was running, suddenly a big cloud was on my head, pouring rain. I got damp and everyone else was dry and I was the only one wet.

So, I found a brown building on a hill, and I ran there only that once I had arrived, I noticed that the windows were shattered and all of the glass was on the floor. There were no doors, just a brown carton to cover the entrance and the roof collapsed; but I still went inside, and to my left, there was a kitchen with dirty dishes. So, I walked to the stove, and I found a dead body on the floor with a knife inside the heart. I started to cry and call for help, but no one came. I tried to save the body myself, but there was no point because the body was already dead. I removed the knife from his heart, covered him with a black blanket and walked to the next room.

When I walked to the next room, I noticed it was a baby room. There were toys and a crib with a note that said "read me", so I had the impulse to open it and read what was inside. I did it and said, "I am sorry that I had to leave and take the baby with me, but what you do is too dangerous for the baby and me. I gave you many chances to change and give up the work you do, but rather than changing, you learned to hide it from me, and I can't live with a man that promises to change but lies and puts his family in danger. Once you change, I will return with love. Signed the mother of your child". I learned more than I was expected to. I knew that maybe the man in the kitchen was killed because he was a dangerous man and worst of all that the people who killed him might be still in the

house. I ran outside the house through the forest. When I thought that no one was following me, I stopped and took a big breath to calm down only to realise that someone was behind me. It was a man with a knife. He pushed it inside my heart and pushed me into the river and left. Then a woman came and called the ambulance the next thing that I knew, I woke up in a hospital.

I explained everything to the nurses and the police officers, but they would not believe me, so they sent me to a mental asylum. It has been years since it happened, and I still remember it vividly. That is why I wrote what happened to remind people not to do something stupid like walk inside an abandoned building or trust strangers because you will never know what could happen.

23. *'MY NINTH BIRTHDAY' BY CHINAZA NTUKOGU*

I remember it like yesterday. It was my favourite day, 8th March 2019, my birthday. After we had all walked back from church practice, my friends and I went to the park to celebrate my 9th birthday. We all walked in through the side entrance and started walking towards the park on a narrow pathway. Unlike most people, we were not scared of walking through the cemetery. We had all been there at least once before. We quietly rushed through the cemetery pathway and onto the big field; here, we looked around for a bit to see where we were. After a while, we climbed through a broken fence and walked further.

Until we came across a closed gate; we all started to panic.

Suddenly, we heard a man shout "All gates are closing!"

Next thing you know, we were running past the graves to make it out. This was the scariest and best day of my life.

24. 'GRAVEYARD PARK' BY CHINAZA NTUKOGU

My eyes slowly focused on the sky as I laid down on the mild pale grass. I looked around and got up from the ground. I walked over to the graves and sat down to read about different lives. I started to walk closer to one of the graves and noticed a strange artefact. I slowly approached and realized it was a strange key.

Suddenly, I turned around to see an old rusty door behind me. I picked up the key and unlocked the door with it. I looked around me to see no one there when an old wrinkly hand, which pulled me in by my leg.

Suddenly, I found myself in a grey cloud of dust and started to feel nauseous.

I woke up laying on the ground near the grave I was last at. The sky was vibrant blue, and the cemetery was full of kids. I saw a sign which said 'new Camberwell cemetery 2014'

'Welcome' I heard a deep voice say.

I quickly turned my head and saw a toddler version of me in the distance with my dad and sister playing tennis on the court together. The next minute they faded, and I was left confused. What was going on?

I looked back towards the playing ground and saw me with them again, playing on the slides and monkey bars; this time I tried to walk closer. However, they walked right through me like I was a ghost.

Later in the distance, I saw my friends and I wander around the park and getting stuck in the climbing bars on my 9th birthday. I shed a tear of joy; I smiled whilst looking through the memories that I have made all in one place. I took a step forward and I fell straight into the large mass of grey smoke and passed out.

*Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

I startled myself and opened my eyes. I was still in my room, as it turned out, it was all a dream.

*25 'NOT ANOTHER DAY' BY EVIE BAILEY*

This wasn't just another day. This was a special one. One I have been waiting for what felt like an eternity. It was the first day we got freedom from being isolated in our houses since the beginning of the pandemic. It was the first time in two whole months we were allowed to socialize with our family and friends outside of our household because of Covid 19. My mum had been planning a picnic with my family as we had only been able to facetime each other recently. The sun was shining, and the park was packed with people meeting up with their loved ones. We had to socially distance (I even had a cheeky hug with my Nan!), but it was nice to see my family in person, it cannot be compared to talking to them on the phone. I never realised how important it was to me to be with them, those memories will be forever in my mind. Happy, comforting memories. The ones that give you a hug from the inside out.

*26. 'A GIRL IN THE PARK' BY EVIE BAILEY*

It felt like another boring day at the park; but it was not. I am not even sure how long I have been standing here for, it feels like decades. Nobody knows I am here; I believe I may be a ghost or a spirit? There are bunches of flowers laid by the woods with my name on, but nobody knows what happened to me, not even me.

I am standing here alone, I feel empty, I have not seen anybody for a while. I can see children playing in the park in the sun, but it is like they are not even there. I have been trying to send out messages, but no one can hear me. I do not understand. Suddenly, I felt a tap on my shoulder, it was the first human interaction I have felt in forever. I plunged into darkness, I opened my eyes and saw something familiar. It was my red

scarf, the one I had worn the day I last saw my friend. The last time I remember speaking to somebody.

The scarf was dirty and ripped. A little bit further away, leading into the woods, I saw my glasses, crushed on the floor. I felt a sharp pang of fear creeping up my spine; I remember what happened. I cannot breathe, I try to cry out for help, but my voice is nothing but a faint whisper. It feels like that day has started all over again...

27. *'THE SQUIRREL PICNIC IN GREENWICH PARK' BY ANNA GARRIDO*

It all started on a Wednesday. Wednesday at 1pm; it was half-term. The hill was powerful and steep; I could feel the pollen going down my throat as I walked up. I tried not to inhale much of the perfumed air. We found a spot and sat down in a half-shaded area. It was me, my two younger sisters, my two cousins, my parents, and our Marks & Spencer's lunch. The food was average but according to the squirrels it looked scrumptious. The beaming eyes of the squirrels were intense. After a few screams, laughter, and efforts to run away, my youngest sister decided to throw a piece of mango at a squirrel. After all the devil stares, the squirrel decided not to eat the mango! So, a crow nibbled it and stole it. I wonder where it ended up? In his stomach? To feed many? Or to be saved for tougher times?

28. *'BARTLETT PARK' BY ANNA GARRIDO*

Bartlett Park is a park in the Borough of Tower Hamlets. The relationship between the community and the park is strong and expected because it serves many football clubs for weekly practices, families have picnics and parties, and people exercise and meet there. Unfortunately, not everyone is careful and respectful, especially when it comes to littering our green space. This park has been recently re-designed to make it a better, safer, and inclusive community park for everybody,

not only for us human beings, but also for dogs. Before the improvement, Bartlett Park used to be an open field for fewer diverse users. Which meant the dog owners could not let their dogs “run free” safely. The refurbishment included the following:

Fenced Dog park

Fenced Accessible and inclusive Children’s Playground

Cafe

Exercise area

Picnic benches and tables

Changing rooms for the sports events

In my opinion, this has been an incredible upgrade to the park as it better serves our ever-changing community.

*29. ‘THE LABRADOODLE’S BLOOD IN THE PARK’ BY ANNA GARRIDO*

My eyes dropped on the flowers and the drawing dedicated to the dog. A cuddly 6-month-old puppy. It was a tribute from a kid, emotionally saying their goodbyes.

The dog park was deadly silent. I could not hold myself from asking questions. My heartbeat rose until the response was spoken. I imagined the flower fairies crying in despair for an innocent life was sent to heaven. I pictured the bloody shirt the man wore when was holding its remains. Three considerable mixed breed dogs, against one puppy. All it wanted to do was to play!

When the dogs arrived, the pure Labradoodle's greeting began. The language got twisted and mistranslated. The dogs misunderstood and answered with anger. No leash, no human control. In the blink of an eye the tragedy unfolded.

*30. ‘A FORBIDDEN PARK’ BY ZUZANNA GARRETT*

The sunlight streamed in through the trees as I slowly opened my eyes. I could hear the buzzing of bees and the chatter of families sitting on the grass; I wonder how I ended up here. I

finally stood up and trudged across the emerald, green grass, not really caring about where I was going, only caring about figuring out how I had ended up here.

Only then, sitting down on a log further away from the crowd, did I realise. I am not allowed here; I cannot remember why but I remember having to promise that I would never come here. I must have hit my head hard.

However, it seemed so peaceful here. How could it be dangerous? I walk through the scarlet poppies picking one or two to add to the wreath back home. Home. Such a big word but where was it? And that is when I panic.

I needed to get home, but I could not. Despair creeps through my bones, keeping me from walking.

Suddenly, the sky goes dark and a buzzing noise, different from bees' burrow into my head. It was so loud I could not stand it. I started running to get away from it. That is when I smelt a rotting smell coming from a tree. I walk towards it, the bark peeling off it and moss covering the tree. I realise it is hollow and a rather big tree. I had the urge to climb inside it, so I did. It was musty and claustrophobic inside, so I tried to breathe less in hope that it went away.

Next, I look down where my feet were and something glints. I reached down to have a better look at it.

Thud

thud

thud

thud.

A strange noise came from the object. Cautiously, I knelt down and picked it up. It was a bronze locket, covered in dried Spanish moss. There were cracks where the moss crept in like a nightmare. I thought I saw a glint, but that's gone now, it's too old. I could not even guess how old it was, -probably ancient. As soon as I picked it up, I felt a tingle in my fingers, a spark more like. I was not imagining it though. Smoke filled up my lungs and orange flames climbed the tree. An intense

heat washed over me; I could hardly stand. I gave into exhaustion and let the flames sting me. The exit was sealed off. Just before everything went black, I heard my mum's voice in my head saying, "I told you so".

I wish this were just an average day at the park.

*31. 'BLAMETH PARK' BY MAGDALINE NWADI*

My eyes smiled in awe as I gazed at the beautiful scenery; I hadn't been to Blameth Park since I was a young girl. The emerald, green trees glistened while the flowers stood still enjoying their own beauty. It seemed like everything was like it used to be, the joy of coming here was still present. My ears danced to the sweet tunes of the birds: it was like I was in wonderland.

Suddenly, my nose twitched as I inhaled a musty and bitter scent. That was when I laid my eyes on it. It lay there as if it wanted me to pick it up; it wanted me to notice it. The artifact was decorated with exquisite designs and was a stunning crimson red. A shoe. Why was it there? What was the story behind it? Who was the previous owner? Many questions circled my head.

I stood there contemplating whether or not I should pick it up. As I crept closer and closer it seemed as if it was moving, making me venture deeper and deeper into the park. All of a sudden, the melody of the birds turned into a deafening screeching noise. The once bright green trees turned into an eerie black. This was no longer the bright and colourful park I used to know, it was now a sinister, and daunting place...



# **THE CLASS TEACHER AS STORYTELLER KESHIA ELLIS**

*INSPIRING CREATIVITY IN UNDER-ENGAGED YOUNG READERS  
(YEAR 1)*

ACADEMIC COMMENTARY

CONTEXT

The Covid pandemic resulted in school closures and transfer to online teaching (exacerbated by regular class closures when the schools reopened). This has resulted in many young learners being significantly behind on their reading against national targets. The pressure from schools to improve reading of young learners could result on class teachers over utilising teaching approaches that favour the ‘higher achievers’ (comprehension, spelling, grammar, rote learning), at the risk of neglecting less engaged learners and those whose learning has been negatively impacted by the pandemic.

Utilising open-ended storytelling as a pedagogic method to engage the whole-class but with an emphasis on creativity that will engage those young learners who would improve their reading by being more confident to be creative.

*INTRODUCTION*

Once upon a time, oral storytelling ruled. It was the medium through which people learned their history, settled their arguments, and came to make sense of the phenomena of their world. Then along came the written word with its mysterious symbols. For a while, only the rich and privileged had access to its wonders. But in time, books, signs, pamphlets, memos, cereal boxes, constitutions—countless

## *Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

kinds of writing appeared everywhere people turned. The ability to read and write now ruled many lands. Oral storytelling, like the simpleminded youngest brother in the olden tales, was foolishly cast aside. Oh, in casual ways people continued to tell each other stories at bedtime, across dinner tables, and around campfires, but the respect for storytelling as a tool of learning was almost forgotten.

(National Council of Teachers of English, 1992, np)

This was my first year as a class teacher. I secured my first teaching position in a two-form South London primary school. My first class at last! It has been a seven-year plan to become a primary school teacher and my first year was a 'roller-coaster' of an experience. The class was overall behind on all subjects due to class closures, remote teaching and a generally unsettled year in Reception because of the pandemic. This was their first year of a stable teaching environment and consistent teaching. Senior leaders decided to instigate carousel teaching in both year 1 classes until the end of autumn term to enable the children to settle into a routine. This was too long, as the children had settled by half-term but being the 'newbie' ECT, I was unable to challenge the decision. It was uncertain by mid-November who was more bored with the constant carousel approach to teaching: me, or the children.

There was a degree of pressure from senior school leaders for the children to make good progress within conventional pedagogical approaches to reading and writing, and the preparations for the National Phonics Screening in June, although this was not reflected in additional resources to the Year 1 classes. A situation that was exacerbated, when my teaching partner had to take three months off for a bereavement from November until March, so there was an absence of regular support from an experienced colleague.

It was during January, that I finally understood and assessed all my children and started to establish a really positive learning relationship with all of them and their parents. I was also

growing in confidence with developing my pedagogical approaches for the children, as this was a very culturally and economically diverse class. There were further considerations for two children who had additional needs, another child was a recent refugee and a fourth child had experienced a major bereavement.

The very nature of being a Year 1 class, they are going to be a very mixed ability group of children. There were clearly three boys and one girl who were becoming alienated within the class due to their slow progress in reading and writing, and absence of them displaying any creativity in the classroom. It was also reflected by two of the boys displaying consistently poor behaviour, although they enjoyed being on their own in the reading corner.

Due to limited staff resourcing levels in the classroom, I needed to establish a pedagogical intervention that would engage the whole class, and particularly those three boys. I did not have a great deal of 'room to manoeuvre', as the teaching interventions were predominantly prescribed by the school to achieve the desired national progress.

The storyteller and storytelling! It came to me in January that I could bring my own love of creative writing and English, in a way that would engage the whole class. The majority of the class were either from West African (Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Senegal) or Afro-Caribbean descent, where there are strong traditions of storytelling. In my early childhood in Jamaica, I recall the storytelling in school of local fables and traditions, and how I became enthralled by the storyteller and the tale.

I read to my class several times a week, which they all enjoyed, but I needed to be more expressive to create a dialogical process to stimulate creativity in all of the children, so I move from expressive reading to participatory storytelling:

Storytelling is retelling a tale to one or more listeners through voice and gestures. It is not the same as reading a story aloud or reciting a piece from memory. The storyteller creates a series of mental images associated with words. The audience stares, smiles, or leans forward to hear more....It is essentially a communal participatory experience (Utley, O. 2022, np).

I appreciated that two of the boys that I was endeavouring to aspire through storytelling were born in Nigeria and Cameroon respectively and were possibly experiencing some negative effects of economic diaspora, so I would try to utilize a folktale from West Africa.

#### THEORY

I'll start with a reflection of why I have become a primary school teacher, as it has been a seven-year journey for me. It's a commitment to social justice and inclusive education, to develop a critical pedagogy to support children succeed and enjoy education, and that means building relationships with my children. Sir Ken Robinson (2017) puts succinctly:

For me, the purpose of education is to help young people understand the world around them and engage in the world within them.... so the heart of education is the relationship between teachers and learners - that's what it's about. Everything else should be focused on making that the best relationship possible (np).

Therefore, my pedagogical intention behind utilising storytelling was multi-layered:

I want to inspire creativity (oral and written) through a participatory process

I wanted to keep building positive relationship with the children, with no one feeling or displaying behaviour of alienation

I wanted to encourage peer learning

To encourage participation as they will learn as aspects of a different, or possibly their own, culture and themselves.

In 1999, Louise Phillips identified the importance of storytelling in early literacy development through a literature review of related international educational publications of the 1990s. Storytelling is seen as a sophisticated oral art form, which not only improves oral language competency but can assist in improving written language because it broadens children vocabulary, as they encounter new and diverse range of words (p. 3). Oral storytelling traditions have less words to understand and can build up children's confidence in vocabulary and understanding stories in written formats, especially if they are encouraged to retell the story.

Dyson, (1991) highlighted the importance accepting children's social and cultural influences to their participation in storytelling: "Young children from diverse sociocultural backgrounds bring their symbol producing prolificity to school – their talking, drawing, playing storytelling." (p. 117). In essence, children are also storytellers from their lives and cultures, and should be encouraged to tell stories orally or to embellish existing stories to build confidence and understanding.

Miller and Pennycuff (2008) were more strident in their academic belief that storytelling was fundamental pedagogical strategy to improve literacy learning for all students:

Using storytelling in the classroom is one way to address literacy developments by improving oral language, reading comprehension, and writing. Because of the interrelated nature of the processes involved in reading and writing, storytelling is an effective pedagogical strategy that can be woven into instruction to increase students' competencies in all areas (p.36).

They argued that is particularly effective for children who are struggling to read at the basic level, as it allows them to engage with the story, possibly relate to the story, and become motivated to learn. They cited that some research has found

that the “weakest readers and writers are often the most adept at storytelling” (p. 37).

### *THE STUDY*

#### *PARTICIPANTS:*

The storytelling was for the whole-class but there was focused time through assessment for learning (Wiliam, 2006) with four children.

Child M: Was EAL, she was performing below age related expectations, although spoke very good English and understands key concepts of language. She loved telling me stories of her family and teaching me some Polish words.

Child R: Was very polite who always tried to do his best, but he was struggling with his phonics, and he was notable to correctly construct his sentences. He was so eager to please and would become disheartened when I make corrections to his work. During storytelling time, he is focused and engaged to my every word.

Child C: Was from West Africa and had been in England for just over a year. He was performing well below age related expectations on all subjects and his behaviour was the most disruptive in the class. He did enjoy the reading corner on his own but his progress in reading was slow.

Child JB: Was from West Africa and had been in England two years. He was performing well below age related expectations on all subjects but might have additional needs but had not been screened for dyslexia.

#### *STORYTELLING:*

I've built a caring relationship with my children, where I often talk about my own childhood. Many of the children were of Afro-Caribbean decent and when I tell them about my early years in Jamaica, they become intrigued. I decided to tell them two stories, one my grandmother told me about a little girl called Melissa and the Mango tree and another from West Africa, a folktale of Anansi the spider who steals wisdom from the world. The second story was deliberately chosen for Child C and Child JB.

In addition, I also wrote a much longer story (see, Creative Writing Component) based on my experiences of having to leave Jamaica to join my mother and sister in London. I hoped it would reassure the children who had recently left other countries to come to London (Child C and Child JB). Finally, I thought I would try and compose an Anansi folktale for London during the Queen's Jubilee: 'Anansi and the Queen's Crown'.

I encouraged the children to ask questions at the end of the stories or I would ask question of them. They could also write a question down on paper or draw a picture of the characters. The children were all sitting on the carpet for the storytelling.

*THE GIRL AND THE MANGO TREE*

(I spoke in a Jamaica accent but avoided the Patois translation).

There was a little girl named Melissa who lived with her Mum and Dad.

Mellissa liked her food.

Mum and Dad were worried about her, and they also did not have enough money to feed her.

One day mum had an idea. She told Dad "let's send her to grandma's house"

Melissa loved her grandma and was very happy to go.

On their way to grandma, Melissa walked past a mango tree. There were so many mangoes all juicy and ripe. They were so ripe plenty had fallen to the ground.

Dad had told Mellissa not to stop to eat the mangoes, but Melissa did. She picked up a mango and was about to eat it when suddenly, the mango began to speak! It said "please don't eat me"

Melissa was shocked, but she replied “I must eat you, I am hungry”

The mango said “ if you do not eat me, something good will happen to you, but if you do, something bad will happen”

Melissa laughed and ate the mango. Then she picked 10 more and ate them.

Soon after that something happened.

Melissa was not able to open her mouth, she could not talk and she could not eat!

Another mango in the tree said “ your dad told you not to stop to eat the mangoes. should always listen to your parents”

Melisa was very sad, she started to cry. The mango felt very sorry for her and said “ok I am going to open your mouth again, but you must promise that you will always listen to mum and dad”

Mellissa said thank you as she ran along to catch up to her father.

Her father said “there you are, I was looking for you. You must be very hungry. I have some mangoes for you”

“No thank you” said Mellissa

Her father was very surprised to hear this, but they were both happy and carried on their way to Grandma’s house.

*ANANSI THE SPIDER: TRIES TO STEAL THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD*

Anansi played a lot of tricks but he was not wise. He wondered what he could do to become wise.



## *Creative Power*

He thought that if he collected all the wisdom in the village he could keep it for himself.

He went about collecting wisdom from the villagers.

Soon Anansi had collected so much wisdom he did not know where to keep it.

He tried to find a good hiding place very high up in the tree.

But as Anansi climbed, he couldn't get to the top because the pot was too heavy.

Anansi managed to get to the top, but he spilt it and all the wisdom fell out.

The animals started to gather and picked up pieces of wisdom for themselves.

And that is how the wisdom of the world was shared with everybody.

The following week in the storytelling lesson the children had to tell their stories aloud to each other and then we would have a lesson where they write their stories. Allowing children, the creativity to rap, sing, draw and role play their stories.

### *FINDINGS:*

Week one: I read the two folktales above in week one. All the children enjoyed the storytelling, as I was more animated and participative than my normal reading lesson.. I would ask questions, for example:

- Who knows where is Jamaica?
- Why do you think Melissa's parents didn't have money?
- Do you think they loved Melissa?

## *Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

- What did Melissa do wrong?
- Do you think her dad would have been angry?
- Do you think the Mango Tree's punishment was fair?
- What do you think are the key messages for you?
- Do you think Anansi is a good spider?
- What is wisdom?
- How do we gain wisdom?

All four targeted children were engaged in answering the questions.

The whole class then had to draw picture of either story, which was also successful.

Week two: The following week there was a 'buzz' of enjoyment from the whole-class as they were to tell their own family stories.

Child M told a story from Poland that her mum had learnt at school. Child R read from his current favourite book. Childs C and JB had not produced any independent stories, but JB was happy to talk about how much he liked his grandmother in Cameroon, referencing the story of Melissa in Jamaica. There were a four of raps, three poems and four short stories. Several children preferred to present drawings of Anansi and Melissa.

Week three: I read my own story of leaving Jamaica and Anansi in London. All the children are enthralled to hear of experiences in Jamaica and my journey to London. They sat and listened in silence, as it resonated with our on-going relationship building. Child C and Child's JB behaviour was exceptional.

Anansi in London, my attempt at an Anansi story was greeted with laughter, as it complemented the schools Jubilee celebrations. They all thought Anansi was very naughty and understood the morals of not lying to friends, not to steal and

## *Creative Power*

the importance of asking if you want to borrow something. Also, they want to go to the Tower of London to see the Queen's crown.

### *CONCLUSION*

Overall, the children really enjoyed the more expressive and participatory storytelling of old folktales from two countries. It became a regular lesson to stimulate creative writing and finding further Anansi spider folktales in West Africa and Jamaican cultures.

I would have to work on my storytelling methods and skills, as I had underestimated how engaged the majority of the children would become in folktales

The best (storytellers) add a sense of drama, careful timing, appropriate voices, and sustain a dynamic relationship with the audience. Experienced storytellers narrate the story using repetition, rhythm, imagery, proverbs, and similes. The use of repetition helps the audience remember the chorus and join in with the storyteller. Using short phrases makes the stories easier to understand and memorize. When the audience is familiar with the story, they actively participate (Berry, 1991, cited in Utley, 2022, np).

If I had been able to implement storytelling earlier in the year, I believe it would have had a greater influence of Child C and Child JB, although they did appreciate my own journey story from Jamaica. If I had more time, I could have sourced more folktales from Cameroon and Nigeria, where there is wealth of traditions of storytelling. I'm sure it did have some positive impact on them, but it will be a longer journey. I am convinced as my teaching career develops that storytelling, and the role of the storyteller will increasingly feature within my adaptive and reflexive pedagogy

Children's language blossoms when caregivers observe closely the interests of children and capitalize on these to stimulate literacy, when children are invited to share their experiences

and their stories, when ready help is available in reading and writing, when a listening ear is always present, and when a telling, laden tongue is available (Glazer & Burke, 1994, cited in Phillips, 1999, p. 7).

The relationship between my children and me fundamental to their learning and enjoyment of education. “Perhaps storytelling’s greatest value for a teacher is its effectiveness in fostering a relaxed and intimate atmosphere in the classroom (Aix, 1988, p. 2). I have found storytelling adds so much value to me establishing a safe and learning environment. In my classroom of diverse children where inclusivity is so important, I agree with Craig et al (2001) that teachers need to understand that there are many ways of telling a good story (p. 46). Oral discourses help children develop more interesting ideas and becoming more confident to an audience and appreciating the cultural differences in interpretation.

## CREATIVE WRITING COMPONENT

### *STORIES FOR YEARS 1 AND 2*

Alecia was ten and living in Jamaican village with her Grandma, who kept chickens, played cards with her friends, went to church on Sundays and had a dog called Sam. Alecia loved school and the sun was always shining and beautiful mangoes that fell from the Mango tree that grows in her garden. Alecia’s mum had gone to London two years ago to find better paid work, as Alecia’s her father had died. Her older sister, Margaret, travelled to London with their mum as she was fourteen. They would stay with relatives until they found a place to live, and her mum had a job.

One day Alecia’s grandma called her in from the garden: “your mum has sent a letter from London; she wants you to go to London to live with her next month”.  
“but I don’t to leave – I want to stay here with you and Sam”  
Alicia began to cry.

Grandma held Alecia in her arms. “Don’t cry my beautiful....it’s going to be all right, you going to see grandma again when you visit from London. It happens all the time”. Alecia tried to cheer-up but the thought of leaving her grandma and school friends made her feel very sad.

Alecia was indeed very sad for the next few days, but her grandma cheered her up by making all her favourites foods, rice, fish, chicken, goat and lots of mangoes fresh from the Mango tree that grows in her garden.

The day came for Alecia to fly to London. Grandma had packed her suitcase the night before and they sat on the porch waiting for neighbour to take her to the airport in Kingston. “I’m going to miss you grandma”. “and I’m going to miss you Alecia” her grandma replied. “You know Alecia, wherever you are in the world, I will always be loving you and a big part of Jamaica will be in your heart”. They both cried.

Alecia waved goodbye to her grandma at the airport, and a very friendly lady, who worked on the plane, took her to her seat. The flight was very exciting although Alecia was very frightened of going to London. The friendly lady brought Alecia some food during the during the flight – it looked very strange food and wasn’t very nice but Alecia ate it all to be polite.

Alecia’s mum and sister were at the airport to meet her. They all hugged and cried “Welcome mi dawta” her mother exclaimed.

Alecia’s mum and sister lived in a flat in Brixton. The journey from the airport took for forever on a small, long smoky train where nobody spoke. Alecia looked at all the people on the train, she had never so many different kinds of people – she tried not to stare. When they arrived in Brixton it was raining,

everyone around them was in rush, but she could see lots of Jamaican people and voices and that made her feel safe.

The flat was small, cold and no chickens. “Mum, where do you get your eggs?” Alecia asked. Her mum laughed “from the shop my dear” “oh” said Alecia “and mangoes too?”

“No, I buy my mangoes from the market, I will take you in the morning and show you”.

Alecia shared a bedroom with Margaret who told her all about London, her friends and school. “It’s alright here in London, it’s not as warm as Jamaica but you will make friends and the teachers are very nice at the school – I’ll will introduce you to them”.

Alecia would be starting at the same school on Monday and was very scared. “What if the other children don’t like me?” She exclaimed. “I thought the same, but it was OK, and you will make friends”. Replied Margaret.

Alecia started school in Brixton, it wasn’t like school in her Jamaican village. It was so large and so many children and noises, but the teachers were friendly, as Margaret had told her. Alecia soon made friends, some were also from Jamaica, or their parents were, but she also made friends with lots of other children, some from countries that she had never heard of before.

The plane landed in Kingston at 5:00am in the morning. It was a year since Alecia had left to live in London with her mum and sister. They had all arrived in Jamaica to visit family for three weeks. Alecia was so excited to see her grandma.

“Welcome back mi darling child” said her grandma when they arrived in her village the following afternoon. “Your heart belongs in Jamaica and tea is on the table” Alecia hugged her grandma and ran into the house to say hello the Sam and the

chickens. On the table was large plate of fresh mangoes from the Mango tree that grows her garden.

*ANANSI AND THE QUEEN'S CROWN*

Trickster Anansi was visiting his friends Giraffe, Elephant, and Cheetah in London.

They invited him to stay to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee. They were all excited about the Party.

Anansi said to his friends "Tell me more about the Queen"

So, his friends began to say the Queen is kind and wonderful.

The Queen wears lovely clothes. She is celebrating 70 years on the throne.

"She has a throne?" Anansi asked excitedly

"Yes, she does, and she wears a crown on special occasions"

"A crown! wow that's amazing"

Trickster Anansi began to think. "Hmmm" he said "I want a crown; I would look good in a crown. If I had a crown everyone will have to call me King Anansi"

"King Anansi.... I like how that sounds" Anansi gave a mischievous smile.

His friends did not realise Anansi was planning to get up to his tricks.

"I can't wait for the Jubilee party thought Anansi"

"While the Queen is distracted, I will steal the crown for myself"

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The next day Anansi started to prepare himself for stealing the crown.

“How am I going to get into the palace, it is such a tall building?”

I know he said, my friend giraffe is very tall I will ask him for a lift, but he mustn't know I'm going to steal the crown.

And how will I hide so that the Queen doesn't see me. I know, my friend Elephant is big I can ask him to hide me, but he mustn't know I'm going to steal the crown.

When I've taken the crown how will I make a fast getaway? I know he said. My friend cheetah is very fast I'll jump on his back, and he can runaway fast with me.

That's it then, I've got everything planned.

It was the day of the Jubilee party. Anansi and his friends were all very excited to see the Queen.

They travelled to Buckingham Palace by train where they waited to see the Queen.

The Royal family arrived on the balcony; the crowd cheered!

The Queen has arrived!! She was looking lovely. She wasn't wearing her crown as it's very heavy, but it was on a chair behind her.

He realised it was time to put his plan in action.

Anansi said to giraffe “You're a good friend, can you give me a lift, but you must keep your eyes closed”

“Sure, said giraffe”

Anansi said to elephant “You're a good friend, can I hide behind you”



“Sure, said elephant”

Anansi said to cheetah “You’re a good friend, can you help me to run away fast”

“Sure, said cheetah”

Anansi’s friends were so kind and willing to help him, but they did not know Anansi’s naughty plan.

It was time to make a move, Anansi climbed on giraffe to reach the palace balcony, he hid behind elephant so that no one could see him. Then he snatched the crown off the chair.

“Oh no, my crown!” shouted the queen.

Anansi jumped on cheetah and cheetah ran as fast as he could, but there were too many police officers. They threw a net and captured Anansi!

When his friends realised what Anansi had done, they were very sad.

‘ANANSI! they said, you are not a good friend. Friends don’t lie to each other’”

Then the Queen said “A good friend does not steal either, if you had asked to borrow my crown I would have said No” You have visit it at the Tower of London like everyone else.

“In fact, because you have been so naughty, you are going to have to think about your behaviour Anansi and learn how to be a good friend”

Poor Anansi started to cry, his plan did not work, and he had upset his friends.

From that day onwards, Anansi learnt that it was wrong to lie, and if you want to borrow something you can ask nicely, but they might not always say ‘yes’ ....and that’s OK.

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Wiliam, D. Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards through Classroom Assessment

# **GUIDING TEACHERS TOWARDS THE POWER OF INTROSPECTION MUHAMMAD ARSAL AYUB**

## *INTRODUCTION*

Almost a third of teachers leave the classroom within five years of qualifying [TES, 2020]. To join a profession with this statement in mind is unnerving at best; at its worst, the ideas catalysed by these words become a burden that throw newly qualified educators, such as myself, into a state of self-doubt pertaining to our career choice. Coupled with the discourse surrounding teacher retention and the numerous factors that make the career so repelling, it is no wonder that discussions around leaving are so widespread amongst educators [TES, 2021]. Over the years, I have both heard and experienced a plethora of factors that can cause a teacher to drift away from their love of teaching. I have narrowed down the facets that I will address in my assignment to those that I deem most critical to a teacher's ability to survive and thrive in the teaching world.

Initially, I envisioned that my scheme of work would only address concerns that arise within the classroom. However, as I began progressing through the lessons I was planning, I realised that many of the provocations that disturb a teacher within the classroom, and the way a teacher reacts to them, both in the short and long-term, are heavily informed by factors that exist and develop outside the classroom. Such problems are often only resolvable through a deep internal dive. Educators themselves must be 'attentive to the interiority of conflict or contradiction that might drive the subject's psychological activities' [Barratt, 2012, p.115]. They must closely observe their psychological state as this is

influenced by numerous, complex factors which sometimes complement and at other times sabotage their ability to conduct their role at an optimum level. Without a teacher recognising and resolving the conflicts that rest unengaged within them, there cannot be a holistic understanding and consequent addressing of what initiates uncritical responses to short-term or long-term concerns. Consequently, my lessons attempt to catalyse moments of reflection that draw on educators' personal and professional engagements in relation to the world of teaching. The foci I have chosen are pivotal elements that shape teachers' perceptions of themselves and the people they interact with. Such perceptions can often become hidden within:

'the pre-conscious, of which one is not aware at any given moment, but which it is possible, more or less readily, to recall to consciousness; and the repressed unconscious, which consciousness resists, because it contains impulses which would not fit in with the rest of the personality'  
[Hoop, 1999, p.31].

Considering the diverse spectrum of psychological variations at play within an educator, I felt it necessary to draw on a variety of experiences in an attempt for teachers to initiate a conversation with the self. I hope that teachers are able to distinguish between and communicate with the lesser and more well-known parts of their psyche. I hope that the creative writing tasks I have designed are able to inspire 'a healing sense of integrity and wholeness' with the privacy that writing provides acting as a protective force [Dowrick, 2007, p. 200]. The consequent 'healing' I hope to catalyse will be a critical one with a heightened introspection on the teacher's part. Consequently, 'within the context of journal writing it is possible to start with those observations and incorporate them into whatever else you are writing.' [Dowrick, 2007, p.200]. The discoveries that emerge from this conversation will, hopefully, intertwine with other contexts of the teacher's daily routine and allow previously repressed ideas to emerge and be understood as opposed to remaining unquestioned, or worse yet, residing, uncalled upon, within the 'unconscious' [Hoop, 1999, p.166]. Consequently, even in times of

uncertainty, such processes can provide invaluable reassurance, stability, renewed direction and purposefulness in all that teachers do [Dowrick, 2007, p. 202].

*LESSON 1 LEARNING OBJECTIVE (LO): YOU ARE THE AUDIENCE YOU NEED TO PLEASE*

We form numerous narratives over the course of our lives that guide our engagement with the world. Many of these are empowering but there are also others that disempower. It is the latter type of narratives that can cause a growing sense of disillusionment with what we do. It is at times like these that we need to question the narratives we are telling ourselves and the extent to which they are useful. 'Choose carefully what you decide to give a stuff about because what you choose to invest your emotional energy in will define your future.' [Radford, 2020, p.13]. Radford's suggestion of measuring the usefulness of our narratives serves to highlight the danger of us misdirecting our efforts. His statement is useful for practitioners hoping to sustain a holistic criticality that is acutely aware of what deserves our attention and what does not. Not all educational institutions will use 'summative and formative evaluation modes and techniques to obtain feedback and information about [...] the well-being of teachers' [Niemi, 2012, p.279]. The Finnish have established something at an institutional level that underpins teacher engagement with and within their profession. However, such deeply rooted practices that care for practitioners are not present to the same extent in England [The Guardian, 2021]. The responsibility therefore shifts predominantly on the shoulders of local institutions, and where that fails, the practitioner themselves. This is where lesson one comes in; it is an attempt to help teachers evaluate their own narratives and better direct their energy to optimise their personal satisfaction. It asks teachers to consider, question and potentially reconstruct numerous facets of their thought-processes and how these influence seminal narratives in their lives.

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Woollard's [2010, p.47] synthesis of Skinner's basic principle of operant conditioning along with Thorndike's elaborations on how this acts as formative assessment, is the underlying pedagogy that has informed lesson one. The former dictates that:

'responses to a situation that are closely followed by satisfaction will become firmly attached to the subject and therefore more likely to reoccur when the situation is repeated' [Woollard, 2010, p.47].

Thorndike elaborates on how this, within an educational context, when students' thoughts are improvised through 'free writing' [Gilbert,2020, p.150] and are drawn out and conversed with, acts as self-directed formative assessment; this provides motivational feedback which helps to initiate discussion around the appropriate measures needed to progress further [Woollard, 2010, p.44]. The lesson is an attempt for critical self-reflection to take place through formative tasks whereby introspective observations are a form of satisfaction that instigate further interrogation.

### *TASK ONE: FREE WRITING (5-10 MINUTES)*

- I want you to write freely about why you became a teacher and what your goals are for the future.
- Express anything that's changed and how you feel about this.

I came for the promise of travel  
I revelled at the thought of tax-free salaries  
I stayed for the impact  
I felt distress in the face of challenges  
I became confused for the future  
I float in limbo

### *TASK TWO: WRITE DOWN THE PROS AND CONS OF THE NARRATIVE YOU'VE CURRENTLY ESTABLISHED (5-10 MINUTES)*

Pros:

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- What I do feels intrinsically rewarding.
- It aligns with my religious beliefs.
- I have doors open for the future.
- I won't be constrained to one place.
- Teaching can pay well if I go abroad.

### Cons:

- I've associated a lot of imagined goodness with an unpredictable future.
- I have limited myself to a narrow perception of what life in the education sector could be.
- I've grown to turn my love for teaching into a mundane reality.
- I haven't been measuring the struggles of daily life alongside the rewarding elements, making me unable to evaluate the meaningfulness of the profession accurately.

*TASK THREE: CONSIDER ONE OF THE CONS YOU'VE LISTED; HOW CAN YOU REFRAME THIS PART OF YOUR NARRATIVE TO MAKE IT MORE EMPOWERING? (5-10 MINUTES)*

Con 1: I need to take a moment to reflect on the harms of an imagined future that isn't rooted in certainty. I shouldn't be placing my hopes in a future that may never manifest. If this is something I aspire towards, I should also have pragmatic backup plans that help me feel at ease and content.

*TASK FOUR: DID YOU FIND EVALUATING YOUR NARRATIVE USEFUL? WHY? REFLECT ON THE USEFULNESS OF TASK THREE IN THE FORM OF UNFILTERED PROSE/POETRY/FREE WRITING. (5-10 MINUTES)*

Thoughts can become chains that enslave us.  
Why continue with a routine that serves us no purpose?  
If this is how we choose to live,  
The only purposes we serve are the agendas of others.



*TASK FIVE: WITH THE OTHER PRACTITIONERS AROUND YOU, DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING TOPICS (10-15 MINUTES):*

- the narrative you have reframed today and ways in which you found this process useful.
- difficulties you may have had in your teaching journey in terms of reframing disempowering narratives.
- support you have or have not received on your journey and why this matters.
- Additional guidance: when speaking with the people around you, be sure to leave any personal judgement of others' concerns and preconceived notions about what constitutes difficulty for you out of the discussion. It is imperative that you engage with narratives provided by others with a generous and open mind-set.
- It may be useful for you to consider the following questions and thoughts during your engagement with others:
  - why did you find \_\_\_\_\_ so difficult?
  - did you ever think differently about \_\_\_\_\_?
  - what would you most like to change about the way you think about \_\_\_\_\_?
  - do you feel that you're on your way to making the changes need to achieve \_\_\_\_\_?

Much of lesson one revolves around personal reflections and observations made by individual practitioners. However, it is through task five and six that I hope to create a communal conversation that is able to be 'consistently searching and reciprocal' (Alexander, 2020, loc 309). This method of dialogic teaching is empowering as it allows teachers to connect more intimately with the community of fellow educators who are in a process of framing and reframing key narratives themselves. This is not a process of reaching conclusive realities but rather a matter of opening up unengaged discourses; it is to help numerous narratives intertwine along with all their inconsistencies, doubts but also their potential. Through this very simple task, educators are encouraged to:

'harness the power of talk to engage [their] interest, stimulate thinking, advance understanding, expand ideas and

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build and evaluate arguments, empowering them for lifelong learning' (Alexander, 2020, loc 299).

*TASK SIX: REFLECTING ON THE COMMUNAL SHARING OF CONCERNS  
(5-10 MINS)*

You will now be working independently to reflect on the ideas raised in your group discussion.

Use the following questions to guide your reflections:

- did you expect to hear the concerns that you did?
- what surprised you most about what people were sharing?
- why was this process of discussion an empowering one on the individual and communal level?

You can express these thoughts and ideas in any form you please – be it prose, poetry or free writing.

Wow. People are really stressed out about a lot of really crazy things.

Who would've thought?

Really, we all know a lot of things are far from perfect.

But we all go on as if nothing can really be changed.

But there's some strange power in a group of people with a shared cause.

It's refreshing, enlivening, it breathed some life back into me.

I think more of this is necessary.

If enough of us shout, someone's bound to hear.

And if no one hears us but ourselves, that's a feat worth gathering for.

LESSON 2 LO: MAKING PEACE WITH A LACK OF STUDENT  
ENGAGEMENT

'It is always a challenge to think relationally, to make connections between the concrete details of your everyday life and the world beyond your immediate context (Doecke and McClenaghan, 2010, loc 72). As teachers, we often become so entrenched in the current moment the classroom brings forth that we forget our ability to reframe key occurrences to better suit our needs. By becoming so caught up in our 'everyday life', we often miss the chance to slow down and tame ideas that unsettle and fatigue us [The Guardian, 2018]. This can often result in the accumulation of unwanted stress; our reasons for why we tolerate such stress draw increasingly distant or non-existent as we struggle to find joy in the daily routines that once stirred our passion. Considering that most teachers accept that 'effective teaching involves teacher-facilitated actions that maximize [sic] the probability of student success' [Scott, 2016, p.6], it is a difficult feat to separate yourself entirely from the tasks you created to enable student success; signs of students getting distracted are often perceived, not just an affront to the activity that a teacher has planned, but also as an insult to the numerous mental faculties and resources which were deployed in constructing said task.

In lesson two, I intend to help teachers think carefully about how they respond to student engagement and all its fluctuations. I hope to outline a set of tasks that help teachers to 'understand themselves, each other and their world better, to reach that depth, make sense of [their] life' [Bolton and Shuttle, 2011, p.17]. It is my goal for teachers to be able to situate themselves more meaningfully in the daily spaces they occupy. I find that teaching-related stress often arises from mental wandering that is not guided by an explicitly outlined desire to make sense of things. Bolton describes this as those things in our routine that we disregard and fail to engage with in a 'process of deep listening', allowing matters that are deeply personal to us to become the 'habitually blanketed' side of our persona [Bolton and Shuttle, 2011, p.18]. She describes

that we do this at our own 'peril' as such repressive processes can only temporarily conceal and not actually heal the issue. It is my hope that more than the questions I have posed, the methodology of questioning the self is what persists in practitioners that engage with this lesson. I hope that the lesson can demonstrate the necessity of teachers establishing 'a private communication with the heart of the self.' [Bolton and Shuttle, 2011, p.18]. It is through this 'private communication' that we can begin to be entirely honest with what is causing us distress and hope to resolve it. Throughout this process, I will be positioning 'creativity [as] a process of learning', 'attained through [revisiting] experience, exploration and expression' [Bolton and Shuttle, 2011, p.17]. The creativity that ensues, allows for past happenings to re-emerge and to be reconfigured, revitalising their agency in helping teachers form a more meaningful understanding of their responses to common occurrences within the classroom.

*TASK ONE: CALL UPON UP ALL THOSE EMOTIONS YOU HAVE FELT OWING TO A STUDENT'S LACK OF ENGAGEMENT.*

Don't hold back. Let it all out. We'll dissect your thoughts and emotions more closely after this. (5-10 minutes)

Why did I even choose this damn job?  
Where every day is a matter of convincing these kids  
That I'm actually here to help them.  
Sometimes they believe me  
Sometimes they don't.  
And I don't doubt that sometimes  
Their faces hide what they're really thinking.  
In moments like this, it feels like an impossibly high  
Uphill battle.  
Checklists to be made for a system that controls our  
movements.  
Bundles of pain, marking, sleepiness, convincing.  
Why am I even here?  
It's for the kids, I tell myself.

Even if they don't want to listen,  
It's for the kids.

*TASK TWO: THINK BACK TO A MOMENT IN WHICH A STUDENT LOST  
FOCUS IN YOUR LESSON.*

Think back to how this made you feel. What questions and thoughts came to your mind? Try to minimise these thoughts and questions down to three which cover the range of emotions and ideas you experienced. (5-10 minutes)

Why is this student never interested?  
Am I boring?  
Did I not plan this properly?

After teachers have come up with their three questions, I will introduce them to the idea of being holistically generous, both in regard to themselves and their students. Teachers must nurture the ability to identify, reflect on and appreciate the diverse spectrum of emotions that impact their conduct in the classroom; this allows for a practitioner to subdue the range of internal obstacles they face; a teacher may feel belittled, misunderstood, unappreciated and a range of other, subtle emotions at the hands of their classes. If these feelings are not taken into account and dissected, they have the potential to become seeds that grow into resentment that takes all the joy out of teaching. They must 'make visible [...] what may otherwise be covert or implicit' [Young and Ferguson, 2020, p.126] within their psyche. Writing can therefore provide critical 'self-understanding ... [and] dramatically support positive self-image' [Bolton and Shuttle, 2011, p.19]. Once we extract and reflect on a moment from our daily routines that enhances our previously narrowed perception, there is a conversation that begins to take place between the perceived image of the self and how pivotal, personal scenarios are shaping it; when this previously precarious identity is expressed through the written word, 'therapeutic effects' begin to manifest that heal the former unattended parts of our lives [Bolton and Shuttle, 2011, p.19]. Here, Bolton attempts

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to realign parameters that situate teachers as outsiders to their own lives; instead, she proposes that a more intimate relationship is necessary between a teacher and their work in which the former must evaluate their own responses to stimuli when they become barriers that need to be deconstructed and reflected upon.

### *TASK THREE: ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS FROM TASK ONE (10-15 MINUTES)*

Why is this student never interested?

In all honesty, this just isn't true. There have been numerous occasions during which the student was interested. It is a part of human nature to easily forget all the goodness when something that displeases us manifests itself. Even as adults, we're guilty of this. Something or someone may have been a source of immense goodness for us but as soon as it/they do something that doesn't resonate with us, we often become quite dismissive. As a teacher, I must counteract this tendency, into which we all slip for too unwittingly, with mechanisms that allow me to dissect the situation with greater confidence and a more collected outlook. One of these mechanisms is breathing. I must breathe. The simple act of taking some deep breaths does wonders for how I'm feeling physically.

Am I boring?

Hell no. I've made so many people laugh and cry in my lifetime that I could never keep count even if I tried. Students, teachers, friends, family, strangers. If the student doesn't find me interesting in the present moment, if the student believes that I'm a bore, then I don't need to convince them otherwise because that's just one perception. Every student has been brought up in an environment that is unique to them. Isn't it quite foolish for me to think that my unique upbringing and lifestyle and the consequent pedagogy I've adopted will be able to be a source of amusement for every student? I think it is.

So stop trying to appease everyone and focus on doing your job, teaching. Do your part and rest at ease.

Did I not plan this properly?

It's possible that I've messed something up. It's possible that the way I envisioned this playing out isn't the way it has actually played out. As long as I reflect on the experience and take into account what could be done better next time, then it's an experience from which I can learn; rather than discourage myself and fall into a state of downheartedness, what's important is that I understand where I went wrong and try not to repeat the mistake. There are many more variables that also affect their response. I need to actively acknowledge the good and view the 'bad' as part of a trial and improvement framework. I need to understand how I can manoeuvre around most mistakes and turn them into meaningful activities.

*TASK 4: SHARE YOUR ANSWERS WITH THE OTHER TEACHERS ON YOUR TABLE.*

Absorb the spectrum of issues teachers face so that you are able to:

- situate the issues you face within a wider educational context, leading you to diversify the responses you give to different types of student engagement.
- enhance your ability to tap into the shared struggles teachers face and enhance your sense of community.

Me: so what was one of your questions or thoughts?

Joe: why did that student throw a paper ball at me and laugh?

Me: no way, so how did you cope?

Joe: initially, it was difficult to tame my anger but I later approached the student and realised there were all sorts of safeguarding issues taking place that had prompted them to act that way.

Me: so why does that incident stick with you?

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Joe: it's the way they laughed afterwards. I couldn't quite make sense of it.

Me: and now?

Joe: I think we've all done things in time of grief we've regretted and even as adults we can't always explain them. I guess it takes big hearts to teach developing minds.

*TASK 5: REMIND YOURSELF OF ALL THOSE STUDENTS WHO ARE ENGAGED IN YOUR LESSONS.*

Envision their faces whilst closing your eyes. Visualise where they sit in your class. As a challenge, even consider thinking about a lesson you didn't plan very well in which they were still engaged. Write one statement that you can refer back to, to remind yourself to focus on the positive, something that will stick. (5-10 minutes)

It takes a lot of effort to focus on the abundance of positives when there seem to be so many negatives. It takes even greater strength to be able to focus on both in an empowering manner.

*TASK 6: LAMINATE YOUR STATEMENT AND PLACE IT SOMEWHERE YOU'LL SEE IT EVERY DAY!*

LESSON 3 LO: ATTEMPTING TO AVOID COMPARISONS WITH OTHER TEACHERS

Teachers work in a climate where comparisons between educators have become a natural by-product of stringent assessment routines [Herman and Reinke, 2014, p.4]. Categories that delineate what a successful teacher looks like form, school-wide, implicit and explicit judgements about good practice that lead to educators comparing their success to that of their colleagues. It is not that comparison is an inherently malicious thing. Rather, it is the way that we have come to compare in a superficial manner that tampers with our judgement. We must evaluate the comparisons we make



between ourselves and other teachers whilst weighing whether our thoughts are as true as they seem. Through this process, teachers can allocate greater value to the judgements that enrich their experience and tame those that hinder the development of our introspective abilities. 'Curiosity is key here. Observe whatever is happening in your thoughts and feelings with interest.' [Dowrick and Unwin, 2007, p. 202]. Teachers must understand that they are 'observing to find out more and not to judge or criticise' [Dowrick and Unwin, 2007, p. 202]. Harsh judgement in moments of vulnerable reflection can obscure our ability to deconstruct and comprehend what we feel and why it is so. To counteract this, in lesson three, teachers will come face to face with some important comparisons they have made in their careers. They will be guided through a reflective process which is underpinned by metacognition pedagogy.

'The benefits of metacognition include [the] ability to learn more deeply and assign meaning to content and an ability to transfer learning, thinking processes, and problem-solving models to new contexts. This can be defined as a 'rehearsal' which will later enable greater, metacognitively led, autonomy [Fishman-Weaver, 2020, p.56].

My goal is to establish frameworks of thought that can be transferred between unique contexts whilst utilising pre-established methods to guide new thought processes.

*TASK 1: WHICH TEACHERS HAVE YOU COMPARED YOURSELF TO IN THE PAST? MAKE A LIST. (5-7 MINUTES)*

Ms Haraan  
Ms Zafrelli  
Mr Khan  
Mr Martin  
Ms Nedgum

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*TASK 2: OF ALL THE TEACHERS YOU'VE COMPARED YOURSELF TO, PICK THE ONE YOU FEEL SITS AT THE TOP OF YOUR LIST OF COMPARISONS.*

Be ready to explore why you've picked this teacher. (2-4 minutes)

Mr Martin

*TASK 3A: WHAT IS IT ABOUT THIS TEACHER THAT MAKES THEM THE OBJECT OF YOUR ATTENTION?*

Make a list of qualities they have, things you've heard about them or general thoughts you've had about them.

*TASK 3B: AS YOU'RE WRITING, BE CRITICAL OF THE COMPARISONS YOU'RE MAKING.*

Reposition your narrative as the central focus; consider the uniqueness of your teaching journey and the benefits of what you've experienced. (5-10 minutes)

Mr Martin.

At such a young age, he's managed to become the head of department and then just when I thought that was amazing, he became assistant headteacher. Wow. He looks so young (okay, so that might be a problem, not knowing how old he is exactly and assuming that he is young). But I've spoken to him about how he's doing so well whilst being so young and he's responded in a way that confirms my thoughts – and somehow he managed to do this in a humble way. I really am in awe of this guy. But I also wonder how much his progression has to do with his department and how much they recognise and nurture talented staff. I don't feel as though that presence, of nurturing members, is strong in our department. I feel as though everyone is trying to compete with one another. And although I'm digressing away from Mr Martin, in an obvious way, I'm not. I realise that he's had a very different experience of teaching, as all members of staff have. If I haven't received the same nurturing guidance, it's a positive because I should

## *Creative Power*

use this to become more proactive in seeking out opportunities. This a lifelong skill.

*TASK 4: I WOULD LIKE YOU TO REFLECT ON WHAT ACTIONS AND HABITS WILL REALLY PROPEL YOUR TEACHING CAREER FORWARD.*

Here, I define ‘forward’ as those things that help you to find value and pleasure in what you do; your definition of ‘forward’ can digress from how anyone in your past has defined it, but it must be meaningful in your narrative. This will be the core takeaway that guides future introspections too. (10-15 minutes)

I think I need to be more conscious of the need to collaborate with other members of staff. I hate this. It makes me uncomfortable considering how everyone always appears so busy. I also hate it when I’m speaking to someone and I feel that they’re giving me a half-hearted response – as if trying to conceal their best tricks. Ultimately, my goal is to become a teacher trainer and empower others; to do this, my practice has to be absolutely solid. It’s daft for me to approach pedagogical matters alone. I have experienced members of staff around me; I should use them.

*TASK 5: WRITE A BRIEF PLENARY SUMMARISING ONE KEY TAKEAWAY FROM TODAY’S LESSON. (3-4 MINUTES)*

Comparisons aren’t the problem. The problem is allowing them to drive your thoughts rather than directing them yourself.

LESSON 4 LO: THE POSSIBILITY OF REGRESSION POST-JOURNALING

It is possible that, despite all of our reflections, we regress into a stagnant mind-set, spurred on by our daily routines, that struggles to see the value of all that we do. In these moments, even if powerful past reflections resurface or new ones form,

we risk becoming indifferent to the messages they carry for us and the importance we once associated with them. This last lesson is an attempt to guide teachers towards creating something that can reignite their vigour within these dark moments. It is an active undermining of malicious ideas entering teachers' conscious and unconscious selves and becoming entities that guide their actions without proper interrogation. This is problematic for the conscious self and the ensuing internal conflict, but what is arguably worse are the ideas that remain within the unconscious. This is because:

'the essence of the process of repression lies, not in putting an end to, in annihilating, the idea which represents the instinct, but from preventing it from becoming conscious. When this happens, we say of the idea that it is in a state of being unconscious.' [Akhtar and O'eil, 2013, p. 166].

When our concerns enter such a state, our conscious thoughts and actions are informed by the consequent, undeveloped and uncritical thoughts of these repressed ideas whilst the initial issue that initiated these thoughts remains unaddressed. Regardless of whether our actions are informed by demeaning conscious or unconscious thoughts, what occurs thereafter is merely an adaptive response whereby surviving becomes the priority as opposed to thriving. I hope lesson four can help teachers to produce something that is so genuine and inspiring that no matter what the circumstance, they are coerced to evaluate where they stand and how their stance came to be. I hope that the processes that are initiated in this lesson can 'generate in students a sense of being 'held' [by their ideas]' and that these ideas 'can then become internalised as a means of self-containment' [Hunt, 2013, p.100]. Hunt describes the transformative impact of this autonomy and how it will arise from participants being more receptive to their 'own sensations or impulses' [2013, p.99]. Therefore, this creative writing task revolves around the proposition of centring oneself to a set of root ideas that reinvigorate behaviours that may have been forgotten or weakened.

## *Creative Power*

*TASK ONE: WRITE DOWN A TIME IN YOUR LIFE WHEN YOU OVERCAME A DIFFICULT OBSTACLE.*

Explore how you felt before, during and after this process. (5-10 minutes)

I overcame having to defer my PGCE. Before making the decision to defer I felt like I had failed. During the process, I struggled to accept what had happened but eventually saw the positives. After restarting, I felt renewed by all the opportunities I was more conscious of.

*TASK TWO: MAKE A LIST OF IMPORTANT HISTORICAL FIGURES THAT HAVE INFLUENCED YOU;*

with the people around you, discuss the hurdles they faced, why they overcame them and the impact of this on wider society. (10-15 minutes)

Muhammad Ali, MLK, Malcolm X, Malala Yousufzai. Ali faced the hurdle of racism but chose to overcome this because he saw the needs of his people. He could've retired comfortably but instead chose to speak up for the oppressed. He became a pillar on which the oppressed could lean and learn from, empowering their own narratives.

*TASK THREE: WATCH THE VIDEOS OF KEY SPEECHES MADE BY THE FOLLOWING HISTORICAL FIGURES.*

What skills and mindsets do they convey that you can also benefit from? Brainstorm ideas. (5-10 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7iPACdAIHQ> – Muhammad Ali - Life Recipe speech.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qa7icmqgsow> – Ronald Regan - The Challenger speech.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ka6\\_3TjcCkA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ka6_3TjcCkA) – Leonardo Di Caprio - Climate Summit speech.

Resilience, foresight, wisdom, fortitude, composure.

*TASK FOUR: WHICH OF THE SPEECHES DID YOU FEEL WAS THE MOST IMPACTFUL?*

Why do you think so? Make a list of qualities of your chosen speech and why it was so powerful.

I think Ali's speech was the most impactful because it felt genuine and humble. He sets up a perception of himself and seems convinced to follow through with it.

*TASK FIVE: CONSIDER THE REASONS THAT MAKE WHAT YOU DO AS A TEACHER SO POWERFUL AND THE EFFECTS OF THIS ON WIDER SOCIETY. (5-10 MINUTES)*

Empower the disempowered  
Help the talented push further  
Connect with the voiceless

*TASK SIX: USING THE IDEAS YOU'VE DISCUSSED SO FAR, WRITE A SHORT POEM, STORY, FREE WRITING OR ANYTHING THAT WILL SERVE AS A REMINDER TO YOURSELF OF THE POWER OF WHAT YOU DO.*

Tell yourself about your insecurities, shortcomings and habits that may drag you into a place of dejectedness. Create something that can draw you back into the passion from which everything arose. (5-10minutes)

Have you forgotten the smile on that boy's face whose life was falling apart?

When you told him he had a lot to do, the world was waiting  
for him step into it.  
Have you forgotten the girl who thanked you for being a  
teacher, for teaching her?  
And doing all that you do?  
Have you forgotten the student who met with your family?  
In your absence.  
And told them for  
“five straight minutes”  
about how kind and amazing he thought you were.  
Have your insecurities about your social status made you  
forget about the heartfelt notes and gazes and smiles and  
questions that were a sign of intrigued imaginations?  
Forget all these things and embark on something more  
prestigious  
Forget all these things.  
Made peace with this narrow-minded success, have you?  
You think the future isn’t filled with similar memories waiting  
to be formed?  
You’re as naïve as the students who disrespect you.  
Maybe more.  
You’re here to help thousands  
And you’ve already imagined yourself at the finish line?

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# **CREATIVE WRITING FOR WELLBEING LORNA MCCOOK**

PAIN MANAGEMENT FOR THE DISABLED AND  
CHRONICALLY ILL

## INTRODUCTION

When faced with a diagnosis of a long-term condition or a disability, patients can face a struggle to learn to live with their new normal. After years of struggling with a painful illness, I then had a traumatic life event. That was when I was advised to start writing. After therapy, I decided to revisit the idea of writing as a way of dealing with life events and long-term illness. A local charity runs a creative writing group which gave me support and confidence to write. I found that I could express myself through short stories and poetry. It is now part of my everyday life but how far does it go towards improving my wellbeing and pain management?

I decided to research therapeutic creative writing and how to incorporate it into my arsenal of coping strategies. Dr. James Pennebaker started research on the effects of therapeutic writing in the 1980's. His research showed significant changes in physiological and psychological health of individuals by measuring brainwave activity. This was only achieved through linking the journaling to emotions rather than venting thoughts onto a page. (University of Texas 1980). This leaves me with the question of how the subjects actually feel and how does writing impact the individual's perception of their wellbeing. I wanted to see qualitative measurements of intrinsic values.

The following lessons are my attempts at measuring how my creative writing makes me feel.

THE MOUNTAIN



Sample lesson plan for adults with disabilities. Before each session, participants are reassured that the group is a safe place where everything is confidential. Participants will be encouraged to share but it is not compulsory. A simple introduction where each person states their name and one thing about themselves fosters a sense of belonging to the group. The group discusses rules they wish to implement, such as the kind of comments they want from the other members regarding their writing.

OBJECTIVES

To encourage creative writing as a form of self-expression and a tool for managing health and wellbeing.

The lesson will begin with a quiet time with a mountain meditation by Jon Kabat-Zin to create a safe calm learning environment.

Looking at the picture of someone climbing Mount Everest alone, in all our lives we have metaphorical mountains to overcome. These could be trials of any kind such as a temporary illness and disability or trauma. When you look at the picture does it make you think of mountain or difficult time in your life that you had to overcome? What springs to mind when you look at the picture? We can start with a free writing exercise for the next few minutes and we don't have to share unless you want to.

## *Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

### FREEWITING

As a facilitator, I will write with the rest of the group. Below is an example of my freewriting which I would share with the group. My creative writing is in italics.

I could picture a mountain with clouds around its peak. The top is hidden, you can't see it through the clouds. It is beautiful, green and alive. I become like the mountain. My body is still and feels heavy and stable. I am totally relaxed. My back muscles stop twitching and the pain in my body fades into the background. There is nothing else in the world. Just me/mountain. It makes me think of a time when I had to adjust to a new way of life.

The group will discuss how they feel after meditating and freewriting.

It feels refreshing and freeing. I don't feel like a teacher will put red marks all over my writing. I don't think about grammar or spelling while doing it. I can do corrections afterwards.

### WRITING TASK

The group will be given time to write about their life as a mountain or mountains. This can be in any style and can include drawings.

#### MY LIFE AS A MOUNTAIN

I'm part of the earth, part of life  
Some see me as something to be conquered  
I endure all kinds of weather  
Storms hurricanes and blistering heat  
I give life and shelter  
A safe place  
A place to be nurtured  
I am rained on  
I grow plants  
I am snowed on  
I give beauty  
Life as a mountain changes  
but I stay the same

## *Creative Power*

### PLENARY

Students will be given time to read through their work privately and make any amendments if they wish. Would they like to share their work? How did they feel? Was it difficult/easy? What difficult mountains did they have to climb in life? Do they want to bring a piece to the next session to share? What would they like to do next week?

### LAKE

The session will begin with a lake meditation by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zin. To encourage a calm and safe environment.

### OBJECTIVES

To give students the opportunity to write poetry about the environment.

To give the student another tool or skill by which they can explore creative writing for wellness.

### FREEWITING

Does anyone have any comments on how they feel?  
Does anyone want to share what they have written?

I will share my freewriting as follows.

I had a sense of being held in the body of the lake. It was comforting and peaceful. It enabled me to relax completely. I would like to do this form of relaxation every day. I think that it is beneficial to have a time of relaxation each day. In my collection of coping mechanisms, I have various forms of relaxation. This lake meditation will be added to my collection.

We will discuss the idea of large bodies of water with ripples or waves on the surface but underneath being calm and still. Sometimes life can be stormy and difficult like adjusting to an illness or disability. How do we remain calm when life gets stormy?

I will then suggest a writing activity that the students and myself will do. They can express their thoughts on lakes in any form they wish. I may read Praise by Dinah Livingstone.

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We will discuss the students' interpretation of the poem in the hope that they will bring their own understanding and cultural background to extract their own meaning. Dinah's poem is in praise of all that nature provides, both good and bad. She seems to celebrate the ups and downs of life and in the last stanza, praises the reader. What does that make everyone feel? Should we celebrate all parts of life, not just sweet parts of life but the stormy weather?

If anyone would like to try writing a short poem, then this is the opportunity for them to try it. Draw pictures or write a story about weathering storms and enjoying the simple things in life.

I would like to sit  
by a lake and just be  
alone with mother nature  
under the tree

The Black Swan  
the ruddy duck  
peaceful  
on a still pond

Deep in the mud lies the monsters that lie in wait  
the monsters are called Pain and Fatigue  
I can't always avoid them, so I learn to live with them.  
They are my constant companions



Still



sometimes they try to pull me under  
sometimes I let them, too tired to fight.

## Creative Power

I wait for them to loosen their grip so I can float to the surface of the water. They never let go but they let me breathe sometimes. Then they tighten their grip and pull me under.

### PLENARY

What did the students learn? I will give space and time to read and discuss each students work. What would they like to learn next?

Thinking of my life as a lake I can see moments of calm and moments of disturbance. I found this easier than trying to describe and express what it feels like living with a long-term condition or disability. This exercise has been freeing, allowing me to express feelings and experiences that I might not have expressed otherwise. I would encourage others to use creative writing in a similar way.

I would like to continue writing about the natural environment. Perhaps with a view to how the environment impacts on health and well-being.



### GARDEN

The session will begin with a guided meditation called the garden. (<https://youtu.be/5bPvASNOVWI>) To foster a calm and safe atmosphere.

The students will be asked how they feel and what images came to mind. The garden could be an imaginary safe place to retreat to when times are rough or life gets difficult. The idea

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is to have somewhere safe and peaceful to decompress whenever necessary.

### OBJECTIVES

To give the students space to write about their ideal garden or open space.

To see their lives as a metaphorical garden with weeds, pests, beauty and something that needs to be nurtured.

### FREEWRTING

Students are invited to write freely for a few minutes not worry about spelling grammar or corrections. I will share my free writing thus.

I grew up in houses that always had a garden and it was something I always took for granted. That changed when I had my children and had to share communal gardens for most of their childhood. We were lucky and lived near large parks and open spaces, so my children spent a lot of time outdoors. I, on the other hand, was a frustrated gardener for many years. Sharing a garden is very difficult because everyone has a different idea of what a garden should look like. There was even an argument when I refused to give permission for a tree to be removed. Wild areas and flowers in the lawn is frowned upon by some, but I love my natural garden that I share with no one but my family. It is a haven for wildlife and buzzes with pollinators for months on end.

I will invite students to share without criticism or negative comments. We will discuss the idea of a metaphorical garden and if any student wants to discuss their idea of nirvana or heaven or anything else they believe in, they are free to do so. We will read Nature Trail by Benjamin Zephaniah and discuss our thoughts and what we think the poem means. What do they think of his rhymes and the imagery?

### WRITING TASK

The students will be given a choice of how they want to express their thoughts on gardens. They can write their own poem after the style of Benjamin Zephaniah or they can write a story, draw pictures or diagrams of a garden or gardens. I will do the same. The garden can be used as an illustration of their life, illness, disability, or coping strategy.



## *Creative Power*

In my garden, I can do whatever I want. I can sit and read or listen to the birds. Play a game of 'name that bird' even. But what I like to do best in my garden is just to watch and listen to life. The Robin pulling worms out of the soil the beetle going about its business, the bumblebee visiting a foxglove, the wasp taking a drink from the bird bath, my cat sitting on the fence watching the world go by. It wasn't always like this.

Once upon a time, a little girl left school one afternoon with two friends to walk home. It was a short journey the friends giggled and laughed, skipped, and played but the little girl had a secret. She had a pain in her right knee and as she walked, the pain became more and more intense. The steps became more laboured and she slowed and soon her friends left her to go home alone. The little girl was left hobbling and struggling to walk. She reached the top of her road and she stopped as a single tear rolled down her face. She started to walk again but by the time she reached the front door with a number 15 on, she was in floods of tears. The pain was excruciating and that was the first time the little girl experienced extreme pain. Little did she know that it was just a taste of things to come and she would find herself years later not been able to stand. Not having any control over her legs and having to learn to walk again. So now that she can walk, she takes a turn around a garden every single day even in the snow. When the turf is wet, she avoids the lawn and sticks to the path but there's always life and something going on in the garden. Something to explore, something to enjoy, something new to see. Whether it's a dried flower head, or the skeleton of a once beautiful plant or even cobwebs where little droplets of water sparkle like diamonds. She enjoys being able to walk, being able to see, smell and touch and that's what gardens mean to that little girl even though she's a grown woman now. The little girl inside with the painful legs, is comforted by her garden.

I will give an opportunity for students to share their work and for each individual to make a helpful comment about what is shared.

### PLENARY

What was learned from the task? How did it make you feel?

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I learned that being outside amongst nature helps me to cope daily. It is one of my coping strategies to spend time outside deep breathing and being mindful. I will use the meditation when I'm sitting in my garden to calm myself and to help me relax. I would like to know how other participants will use open spaces or gardens either imagined or real to help with their health.

Perhaps for the next session, we could look at forests if everyone enjoyed The Garden lesson.

### FORESTS



Painting by Gustave Dore

The session will begin with a guided relaxation based on a walk through the forest. The students will be reminded that everything shared in the lesson is confidential and not to be repeated outside the room.

We will discuss what we know about forests, man made or natural and whether anyone has ever been for a walk through a forest. What did they like or dislike about the forest? What did they notice about the light the sounds and the flora and fauna? How does walking in the forest make them feel?

## *Creative Power*

### OBJECTIVES

to use narrative or poetry to express feelings about being ill or disabled.

For students with background knowledge of the classics or religion to explore using that knowledge to express emotions.

### FREEWITING

The students will be given the opportunity to write freely for a few minutes with the option of sharing with the group. They will write their thoughts on the group discussion about forests. I will share my piece of writing with the group and remind them that free writing is not something to be graded or assessed in any way.

There is a forest in South Wales that I would like to walk through every day but maybe not the whole thing. I don't think I can walk that far. It is peaceful with the sound of animals and a babbling brook. There are several clearings to take a rest and just enjoy nature. I've never seen a wolf or a deer in this particular forest but I would love to see a deer. I don't know how I'd feel about seeing a wolf. On a wet day if you look up you can see mist rising in the distance. The hills are covered with trees sometimes you can hear an animal calling out. My visit to South Wales was the first real forest that I have ever experienced and it is something I would like to repeat and experience over and over again. It's quite different from walking in woods or through the countryside.

### WRITING TASK

Write about your life as a journey through a forest. Were there beasts to contend with? (The beasts could be disease or difficulties) The hills could be symbolic of something to be conquered or overcome. Does religion play a part in your management of your illness or disability. How could that be represented in your narrative or poem? I will read from Dante's inferno to see how he describes his journey through the forest. What do the students think of the images? What do they think they mean? What does the wolf represent? Have you ever been lost in life like Dante in the forest? What happened? Were you rescued and shown the way? Were

there any moments of bright sunshine through the forest canopy? What were the sunny glades in your life? This does not have to be a factual story or poem. The idea is to express whatever you want in a style of your choosing.

One afternoon the Amina was asked by her mother to collect some snails so her mother could prepare her brother's favourite meal. So, Amina set out searching for snails. She knew that the best ones would be found in the dark damp of the forest so that's where she went. She could find and collected them one by one in her apron. She was so busy concentrating that she didn't realise that she had travelled to the heart of the forest where it was dark and cool. She shivered and looked around. She felt panicked and wondered how long she had been there. She was lost and afraid so she sat by a tree and thought about how she would get out of the forest and return home.

She decided that the best thing to do would be to keep moving. So, she stood up and wondered which direction to walk. She looked around and saw a light in the distance. She made her way carefully towards it, stepping over fallen tree trunks and creeping plants. She stumbled a few times and dropped her snails. It was difficult but she made her way to the clearing, the sunlight was warm and she felt cheered. She sat down and rested for a while. She heard a rustling nearby. What could it be? She stood up feeling alone and afraid and as she looked towards the sound, she realised it was a baby elephant. The elephant asked her if she was lost and she immediately started to cry. She was relieved that someone cared and understood why she was alone in the forest. "Can you help me please?" she begged the elephant. The elephant replied that she too was lost but needed company as she tried to find her way back to her family. They decided to help each other even though they were both lost. They set out together to find their way back to their own family. On their way they collected snails for Amina. It wasn't long before they found their way back with Amina holding the elephant by the ear when it was too dark to see. When Amina got home, she realised she hadn't been gone long and her mother greeted her as usual. The snails were cleaned and prepared so her

## *Creative Power*

brother enjoyed his favourite treat when he returned from work. Amina was happy that she could make her family happy, even though she was lost and afraid for a while.

### PLENARY

I will share my writing, in the hope of giving encouragement to others in the group. I will ask the students how they feel about writing about life's difficulties as a metaphorical forest. Is it something they would want to do again? Can they see any benefits to their wellbeing?

### CONCLUSION

The lessons are based on the constructivist theory of learning. It is the belief that a student or individual has knowledge that can be built upon. This prior knowledge enables the learner to develop their own meaning making and understanding. I think that this person-centred approach encourages the learner to use their own culture, prior experiences, and belief system to learn. This is preferable to imposing the dominant culture, whatever that may be, on interpretation and the creative process. "Children are active thinkers, constantly trying to construct more advanced understanding of the world" (Siegler and Ellis 1996). I applied this theory to adults with varying cultural and educational backgrounds to be inclusive. Giving the learner choice and control over what and how they learn, directly influences engagement and outcome. I have placed an emphasis on the social aspect of learning. This is often attributed to philosophers such as Plato. But it is an important aspect of teaching for many societies and has been for centuries. Some cultures in Africa and the Americas, for example, has a tradition of storytelling that serves as a way of teaching and passing on culture through generations.

I have placed less emphasis on the behavioural aspects of teaching because I would be working with a group of adults that have their own ideas on how they want to do things. There is no need for exams or grading because the results are totally subjective. Each individual will decide whether the

lesson or exercise is successful in helping them deal with a long-term health condition or disability.

I decided to use pictures or photographs as a prompt for the writing exercises. But artefacts and music could also be used. I have also decided to use time of relaxation and meditation at the beginning of each session. I believe that this would foster an atmosphere of safety and a sense of calm to help facilitate learning. There is also another reason for including relaxation and meditation. Relaxation is one of the tools employed by pain specialists to help with pain management. As I'm dealing with individuals who might be experiencing pain and stress, starting the session with relaxation would dampen stress and help with pain. I have found through my own experience that writing creatively is more difficult in times of extreme pain and fatigue. I have learnt through my own experience also that managing health conditions needs a holistic approach. That means that creative writing alone is unlikely to affect the long-term management of health conditions. A small-scale study by C.A. Brown, B.D. Dick and R. Berry (2010) found that the positive effects of creative writing on well-being were short-lived. The participants were given narrative therapy over a short period of time. They were then tested after a short period of weeks and asked to report on the effectiveness of narrative therapy. They reported that the effect faded. I infer that for narrative therapy to be effective it needs to be ongoing. I created lessons with the intention of equipping individuals with tools or the ability to write creatively, experimenting with different formats and styles.

I wanted to include poetry and prose to give students a choice of expression. I deliberately included a lesser-known female poet alongside a popular modern poet, Benjamin Zephaniah. The idea is to provide variety and introduce lesser-known poems. I also included the first part of *Inferno* by Dante. With these poems I hoped to encourage discussion about meaning. There is also scope for performance and discussion about the natural environment including conservation. With *Inferno* by Dante I omitted my own interpretation or even widely

accepted interpretations of Dante in the forest. There are many religious and mythical events described in the poem. But to impose my views would probably stunt or impede free discussion. I would prefer students to bring their own understanding to the interpretation of poems or stories shared in each lesson. The same applies to pictures and artefacts.

The choice of using visual and aural prompts is to include as many different learning styles as possible. There may be people in the group who are visually, hearing, or learning impaired and I wanted to include everyone. The hope is to make everyone feel that their needs are being catered for without making it seem like that they have additional needs that needs to be accommodated.

While working through these exercises I have found it easier to manage my physical pain and it's difficult to quantify whether that's because I spent time relaxing and meditating, or whether it's because I was writing creatively about my struggles with health. Because I have taken creative writing as a part of a collection of management techniques, it would be difficult to isolate which of these activities worked.

I found that relaxing meditating without writing was effective in relieving my perception of pain but the effect only lasted for hours or minutes. I think it would be beneficial to set time aside each day for relaxation and meditation rather than expecting the effects to last. I tried not just meditation but other forms of relaxation including basic Qi Gong and the method of relaxation was less important than the act of relaxation. Meditation during the first part of a lesson fosters a calm and safe atmosphere. Students need to feel they can be free to express themselves without fear of harsh criticism.

Free writing is part of the process of giving confidence to the student. I assume that students will have experience of writing in school classrooms where they were assessed and tested. Once students realise that they won't be graded or assessed,

it should help to encourage them to write freely. (Elbow, P. 1973)

I have been deliberately vague about spiritual or religious aspects of creative writing because I want individuals to include or exclude their spiritual beliefs as they see fit. Sharing *Inferno* and not imposing my beliefs or lack thereof should help to give students confidence to include their own spiritual beliefs. This is important because to take a holistic approach I need to be aware of not just physical or educational need, but also spiritual and emotional needs.

I have learnt through this process that there are many barriers for some students to overcome when attempting creative writing. I found it difficult to physically write either with a computer keyboard or pen and paper. The act of writing is painful on the muscles and joints. I found it easier to break tasks up into smaller activities with breaks. This made writing tasks take longer than it would for someone with less physical challenges and I need to bear that in mind when planning lessons. Short breaks were absolutely necessary to complete tasks. I have now built that into my own collection of coping strategies. Other strategies include moving regularly and using technology wherever possible to complete tasks. In a classroom situation students should be allowed or encouraged to record their creative writing any way they choose.

If I had to plan a scheme of work for adults of various abilities, needs and educational background again, I would choose tasks and include breaks for stretching and relieving aches. I would also plan homework tasks for those who wish to research and maybe practice new skills they acquire during the lesson. The homework could be presented during the lesson and discussed as students see fit. I will teach story writing skills as and when the students require it. This would include discussion about what a story actually is. I would expect many students to say a story is a series of events with a beginning a middle and an end. (McKee. 2014). Although there is more to



it than a beginning and inciting incident and a resolution. I would also include the short story format as well as various styles of poetry including haiku, sonnet, performance poetry and any others the students are interested in.

It was also important for me to write alongside students. Reciprocal teaching encourages and gives confidence. I've included my own creative writing in this assignment and they are written in italics. I tried not to produce polished pieces of writing so as not to intimidate and discourage students from writing in their own style. I hope I have succeeded in giving examples of my own writing that would encourage others to write.

I have found that creative writing helps to come to terms with life's difficulties and I see it as a therapeutic tool. I would caution against it being relied upon in isolation because the effect can be short lived. I found that writing specifically about my health no more helpful than creative writing generally. I wrote about a difficult memory that had been forgotten for a long time. As a consequence of thinking about the event, writing about it and reading it back, removed the pain of thinking about it. I wonder if it is the experience of recording the event or reading it back that helped?

The act of reading uses eye movements that is similar to the movement used in a type of psychotherapy known as eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR). It is a form of therapy used for post-traumatic stress disorder. The patient is asked to recall an event and at the same time receive bilateral stimulation. Thereby moving the eyes in a rhythmic left to right pattern. This treatment is endorsed by the National Health Service and is considered effective. I wonder if there is any relation between the eye movements when reading and the eye movement in EMDR. Eye movements during reading can vary depending on the purpose and reading ability. The eyes, when reading English, will move from left to right with pauses and regressions. (Koorneef, A. Mulders,

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I.2017) I don't know if there is a link and I could find no relevant research linking creative writing to EDMR.

My wellbeing has been impacted positively from creative writing but it has to be viewed as a tool for health management rather than a one-off cure. I suggest creative writing might be incorporated into a daily or weekly routine to provide an activity alongside other treatments for long term health concerns.

# **ART ISN'T SERIOUS: EMILIA AMODIO**

*AN EXPLORATION OF CUT-UP AND ERASURE POETRY AS  
PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE*

Tristan Tzara (2011, p.3), before declaring that 'art isn't serious' (2011, p.4), states that Dada philosophy is 'wise enough' to know, 'that we cry liberty but are not free'. I see the Creative Writing Workshop similarly to the way in which Tzara (2011, p.3) eulogises Dadaist thinking, in that the workshop is a place where, as a group, 'we are actually searching for the central essence of things.' As a student of Creative Writing, classes and traditional workshops have both liberated my writing, and hindered it.

I now realise that, previously, my writing practice was centred around the imprudent perception that my writing should be presented to others in a relative state of refinement. Freewriting, a new practice to me since starting this degree, has transformed my approach to creative writing. It has shown me that the words I put to the page are valuable in every one of their drafts, from conception to finely edited. The practice has reminded me that we are all writers, if we want to be: 'it's something I have done myself. No one can correct me. It's mine' (Bolton 2011, p.33). However, the prospect of freewriting in a workshop setting grips me with anxiety, I've found myself in a state of panic, arms numb, my mind blank – a visceral need to stop my legs from walking me out of the room. Maybe it's the public admittance of my fear of the blank page that terrifies me. Perhaps I'm 'scared of what might turn up on the page' (Bolton 2011, p.45). My own self-doubt has, at times, led me to wonder if it's simply due to my own creative restrictions. Maybe I just don't have "good ideas". For writers like me, it's important to remember that we are none of us alone in the 'recurring twinges of panic that [we] won't be able to write something when [we] need to [...] It's a constant fog that clouds the mind' (Elbow 1998, p.60).

Consequentially, I am using my own experience as the stimulus from which to approach this assignment, in a bid to create (quoting Ted Hughes) 'games to outwit the controlling inner policeman' (Bolton 2011, p.23).

This assignment will look at the benefits (and the pitfalls) of incorporating collage techniques, cut-up and erasure poetry in writers' workshops, to generate 'visual, aural and tactile skills', in the hope of liberating those of us with the 'misguided perception that creativity is in the province of the few' (Gra, Goo & Lam 2005, p.11). I believe that collage, with its multitude of pedagogical possibilities, can 'create a position from which to write' (Kraus 2018 p.14). That it can strengthen what should be the basis of all writing workshops: the motivation that 'we are all but poets, all of us. As long as we retain our ability to play' (Bolton 2011, p.105). The practice of collage reinforces the notion that 'we each successively climb upon the shoulders of the other's restructuring, so that at each climbing up, we can see a little farther' (Elbow 1998, p. 50). I aim to demonstrate some of the myriad ways in which collage techniques can help to reflect and distil writers' multifaceted and multimodal individual experience (Hamand 2009). I will explore some of the ways in which collage, cut-up and erasure poetry can tap into writers' infinite combinations of unique cultural references, fascinating intersections, complex nuances, and unique lived experiences. Ultimately, 'you can't be really fecund as a producer unless you know you'll be able to go at it with a ruthless knife' (Elbow 1998, p.60).

Joshua Clover (2011, p.85) argues that 'culture is always already collage, insofar as culture is the aggregation, circulation, and management of symbols that dialectically express and conceal social relations.' This assignment leads, in agreement with Clover, 'from the assumption that culture is a complex process of sharing and signification. Meanings are exchanged, adopted, and adapted through acts of communication' (McL & Kue 2011, p.2). Collage has shapeshifted from the ancient Cento and medieval Hebrew

Melitzah literary techniques, through to the artists of the Dada, Surrealist, Cubist and Pop Art movements, such as Tristan Tzara, Max Ernst and Pablo Picasso. More modern examples include beat writer, William S. Burroughs, T.S Eliot, Renata Adler, James Joyce and rebel feminist Kathy Acker; writers who turned cut-up or disjointed vignettes of writing into the cornerstones of their literary styles (McL & Kue 2011).

And now in our contemporary lives, where Ctrl+C + Ctrl+V is readily actioned at our fingertips, 'through the transgressive and critical manipulations of media technologies, consumers of mass media have become producers—or reproducers, remixers—of mass culture' (McL & Kue 2011, p.13). 'File sharing as a social fact has done the work of collage a million times over' (Clover 2011, p.92): Tik Tok, Instagram Stories, split screens, filters, audio-visual collage-making tools online, the products of which are everywhere we look. 'Although appropriation has arguably always been at the heart of the artistic process, never before has it been so easy to do' (McL & Kue 2011, p.12). TV, film, and theatre are works of cut-up art – with every process that layers meaning upon context. This applies from scripted drama and comedy through to documentaries as exemplified by Asif Kapadia, who cuts excerpts of personal and broadcast footage to build dramatic narratives of subjects, such as Amy Winehouse and Ayrton Senna. Since the age of digital music production, our ears are used to consuming cuts, loops, samples of vocals and layers of sound. This applies to all studio produced music – but there are also notable artists who blend their work by collaging sounds and lyrics: Radiohead, Burial, Everything is Recorded and Fred Again would be the artists I'd pick as examples from my own playlists. In contemporary literature, Sabrina Mahfouz's recently released book *Bodies of Water* is a current example of the kind of collage writing employed in creating a body of work that crosses from stage performance to poetry, prose, musical influences, memoir, and historical examination of Britain's colonial past. And in the realm of political satire, *Cold War Steve* is arguably the most notable

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in using cut-up techniques to critique the grim reality of the UK after over a decade of Conservative governance.



©Cold War Steve

### Conversations and Texts: Cut-Up Words and Images

This exercise demonstrates the collision of poetry writing and visual collage as a tangible piece of art, in the hope that this activity can inspire further methodological concepts. I wanted to produce an exercise that included ‘physical, musical, aural, [and] visual thinking’, to ‘produce new and unusual connections between ideas, domains, processes and materials’ (Gra, Goo & Lam 2005, p.12). This exercise tangibly demonstrates Mills’ (2006, p.18) assertion of the ‘mind’s tendency to make images even in the most ordinary of circumstances [...] only by means of the act of attention itself.’

Bolton’s definition of poetry is the creation of meaning in existence: ‘since existence is mostly ordinary, then poetry needs to illuminate the mundane’ (Bolton 2011, p.101). I started by journaling words that had been spoken to me over the course of a week. As, ‘memory is often the primary source of imaginative experience’ (Mills 2006, p.12), I wanted to record the phrases that, for whatever reason, acutely lodged themselves in my mind. I noted things my partner said to me

in an argument; things my four year old and seven year old children had said to me; instructions from a nurse during my routine smear test; a friend's advice about our shared experiences of debilitating anxiety; a text from an estranged friend; the words my cousin's ex told me after finding out she had been cheating on him; words uttered by a chiropractor, and about a friend with terminal cancer. I recorded the phrases out of context and, as they are formed from memories, 'they are not exact replicas of what [I] experienced; they're what [my] mind turned them into' (Shields 2010 p. 59).

During that week, I had been struck by something that I had said to my kids after they had come to me, furious at one another after an argument. Each of them was listing with indignation the wrongs the other had inflicted on them during the row. I asked them which of these conflicting accusations were lies and which were truths – a ridiculous question on my part of course, as if lies and the truth are purely binary, objective concepts. This made me think about how Kathy Acker 'lied all the time' (Kraus 2018, p.14), and whether any of us are ever really telling "the truth". So, I recorded my words to be used as the only dialogue that had been uttered by myself within the piece.

I then tried to find thematic logic; to interrogate my subjective self against my objective eye – to try to create some form of structure from the collection of illogical phrases (Hamand 2009). The snippets of conversation ranged from the profound to roadside chat, but they all had importance to produce something 'simultaneously ordinary and extraordinary' (Bolton 2011, p.101). I re-wrote the phrases, stripping them back further into smaller fragments of their parts and reflecting on what I was drawn to in that moment. Once I had fine-tuned and cooked down (Elbow, 1998) my collection of words, I played with lines and attempted to draw associations between different cuts of text, punctuation, and word placements, looking for 'unexpected likenesses and connections between disparate domains' (Gra, Goo & Lam

2005, p.11). I played with the musicality of the words to see if there was space to work the rhythm and the metrics. I didn't allow myself to change any of the words, except to rephrase my own about 'lies and truth'. It was frustrating at times not being able to change the words, or to have the words I would have preferred at my disposal. The words I did have, became a 'series of awkward obstacles' (Mills 2006, p.19). Yet these limitations forced me to work with what I had, to try to find meaning within the fragmented parts. The more I adapted the lines and weaved the words in amongst others, the more the words moved away from their initial 'reality'. They began to form a new body, a new sense of significance.

My approach to the physical creation of the piece was to centre it around imagery that reflected the mood of what the writing had become. Collecting and curating cuttings is laborious, but not inately so. Some things I rip out, some things I cut out, 'paying attention to what [I am] doing at any one time, cutting out extraneous thoughts or awareness: the opposite of multi-tasking' (Bolton 2011, p43). I like the way the images and words look out of their original context – they begin a kind of transfiguration of distortion. A visual metaphor for the shifting of meaning and purpose. I questioned the relevance of each image to the piece. It's a reflective practice that inspires 'persistence to see a piece through to completion' (Gra, Goo & Lam 2005, p.14). Sifting through articles gives pause to read something new, or to remember a snippet of time as it was before. The process encourages an accumulation of knowledge as well as a space to generate ideas.

Clover states that to collage is the verb 'to take' in its full glory, 'freed from allegory' (Clover, 2001 p.92), but I would argue that a practice of collage that promotes stealing at will is reckless and damaging. Collage should be used with more consideration than simply as a summation of aesthetic. Gratuitously using text is inappropriate practice. For example, in this piece I used the cuttings from an interview with a



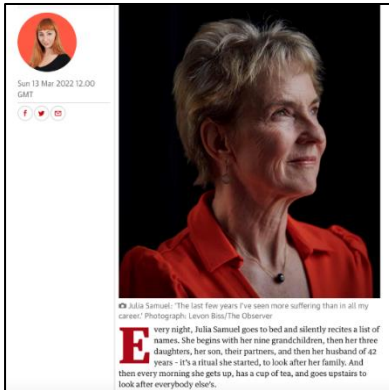


FIGURE 1 THE OBSERVER 13TH MARCH 2022

bereavement therapist who supported my mother after the death of my brother. Decontextualising the words of a person who had meant so much for my mother's recovery felt complicated, but I concluded that the context was appropriate.

However, any headlines found recounting the

horrors of war, or the world's refugee crisis, or acts of hatred or division, I resolved only to use in the context of positive activism. Just as with any creative activity, positions of privilege must be considered. Words should be appropriated appropriately.

The final part of the task was to arrange my cut-up text. I used text from newspapers and magazines, but the words could have also been cut directly from my journal. Using newspaper and magazine text created an opportunity for interesting word play in choosing larger and smaller fonts for particular words. Sometimes I chose smaller definite articles or took time to consider whether an adverb should be larger or smaller than the adjacent words. These choices added an extra layer to the metrics of the piece. I also found that, when positioning physical words against the collage, I was given one more opportunity to edit the structure and positioning of the words

Women and children beg for help in video from besieged Mariupol steel factory

FIGURE 2. THE OBSERVER 23<sup>RD</sup> APRIL 2022

before finally fixing them to the page. This practice manifested itself as a

visual and intuitive representation of the editing process

which, for a visual thinker like me, was a useful exercise. The QR code in Fig. 3 is a timelapse film showing my process.



Fig. 3 – Cuttings & Text

Regarding this exercise's pedagogical value, it's important to note that there is a degree of planning involved, especially when it comes to the collation of text and imagery. To create a collage piece as involved as this one would require significantly more time than the usual workshop time of a couple of hours. However, journal reflections could be taken by workshop participants the week prior, with the time allocated to cut-up during the workshop. Participants would need to bring their own cut-up imagery if the workshop time was dedicated to the collage making itself, unless the practitioner is able to supply materials. Alternatively, participants could collate journal reflections during the workshop itself. This could be group work where participants collage each of their phrases together, creating a body of writing with surprise elements for all. The collage work itself could take place outside of the workshop, to be exhibited the following week as a series of different forms of interpretation.

Joelle Taylor, in her masterclass for this module, asked a course member to pick up a book, flip it to a random page and pick the first line which would then become the first line of their workshop piece. This is a process that could also be extended through this cut-up and collage exercise, whereby

participants take a line of a poem they like and either write their own from there, or actively cut-up and reshape poems into different meanings in the style of Cento poetry or Kathy Acker. The idea being to put ‘the pieces together like a film [...] to find connections between disparate realities’ (Kraus 2018, p.49). This also applies to the refining of writing as a craft: Cremin and Myhill showcase this clearly in nine-year-old Brandon’s writing journey collage, which was used as a ‘tool for conversation and reflection’ (2012, p.65). David Farmer’s ‘Role on the Wall’ is also a form of collage, and this process can be used as a visual tool to build up plot, character, and worlds. For visual thinkers, it could also be a beneficial exercise to break existing texts down into an interpretation of its narrative layers, creating cut -up art that visually represents the complexities of the text.

Cut-up representations of individuals can also work as creative ways to introduce participants of workshops. Not all group participants have the confidence to advocate their own ‘acquired culture’ in passing conversations. A depiction of participants at a particular moment through collage, perhaps reflecting what they are currently influenced by, listening to, watching, reading, their home life etc. This approach could be an opportunity for the group to really ‘listen and see’ (Mills 2006, p.2). A way of bringing participants’ ‘experiential knowledge’ to the classroom, in a ‘nonhierarchical way’ (hooks 2014, p.84), setting the precedent that ‘everyone’s voice can be heard, their presence recognized and valued’ (hooks 2014, p.185). Personally, I would find it a much more interesting way to be introduced to a group with whom I would be required to share so much. It would beat the kind of vague introductory questions that put pressure on participants to come up with quick witticisms, the kinds of on-the-spot questions that make my mind go blank, as I try to ‘connect / Nothing with nothing’ (Eliot 2021, p.67).

It is important to note that newspapers, magazines, and other such resources are luxury items. It’s vital that variations of this exercise can be adapted so that the ‘pedagogical process is

[not] shaped by middle-class norms' (hooks 2014, p. 185). This exercise can be stripped back; words can be collaged without cut-out, without glue, assembled with just a pen and paper. Through all its potential interpretational avenues, I believe this exercise could allow practitioners and participants to explore 'pedagogies that are less contingent upon pre-determined meaning, drawing upon aesthetic and imaginative dimensions of learning that resist the notion that there is one way of getting it right' (Whitelaw 2021, p.2). I believe this approach is vital in supporting writers, of any age, to free their creativity. This exercise provides a solid representation of Ron Carlson's view that it is possible to build narrative or poetic structure from 'bare bones' (Law-Viljoen 2012, p.135), that creating art 'is like a recipe' (hooks 2014, p.91-92) but with no necessary instructions. And just as the words are built, involving the creator to seek solutions in 'actively fashioning, shaping, moulding and refining the ideas generated' (Gra, Goo & Lam 2005, p.13), they are also de-familiarised and re-organised, 'to enhance surprise' (Mills 2006, p.62).

### **Found Poetry: Activist Re-appropriation and murder.**

The immediacy of social media hovers between positive and negative influences on our daily lives. A scroll down a twitter rabbit hole can take us from liberation of information to barrages of hatred. The cacophony of noise between our real world and online experiences, from the relative safety of our echo chambers to the menace of online trolls, can be overwhelming. Between global tragedy and the complexities of our lived realities, it can be hard not to feel intimidated, as though the comparative "minuteness" of our own individual voice is pointless. This sense of "minuteness" can be a difficult place to create from. Exercises in forms of collage poetry can be a really good way of laying the first stone in the face of such intimidation, especially when it comes to activist writing. And it has the potential to be more than just a technique to break of the ice, 'During the First World War [Tristan Tzara and Kurt Schwitters] cut out the words of newspaper articles and rearranged them according to chance, thus rendering war

propaganda nonsensical' (McL & Kue 2011, p.2). I wanted to take issues that I believe are a threat to the progress of feminism today, to interrogate how erasure and cut-up methods, through the act of reclamation, might serve to disorder patriarchal norms.

Like desire, language disrupts, refuses to be contained within boundaries. It speaks itself against our will, in words and thoughts that intrude, even violate the most private spaces of mind and body. (hooks 2014, p.167)

I created an erasure poem, taken from the beginning of **JK Rowling's 2020 open letter**, in which she defends her reasons for her gender critical views. I wanted to be mindful of the difference between creativity and indeed education, 'as the practice of freedom and education that merely strives to reinforce domination' (hooks 2014, p.4). In this case, as I was using a text that goes on to discuss Rowling's own experience of domestic violence. It was clear to me that her words detailing the experience of coercive brutality should not be tampered with. In erasing these words, I would become the patriarchal oppressor. Instead, I took the start of her open letter in which she introduces a defence of her transphobic tweets. It is within this introduction, where I believe she is reinforcing her domination, by punching down. My practice involved reading and re-reading the three pages of text. In every re-reading I tried to shake off my own reactive response to the writing, focusing on a close reading of her words. I then asked myself what I would like her to be writing instead. Once I had a sense of that, I searched for the words within Rowling's own worded framework that I could reappropriate, in order to convey the message I wanted to make. The details of this practice can be viewed in the timelapse QR below.



Fig 4. With JK Rowling's Words

As a writing exercise, this focused on creating something from conflict, a place of discomfort. In some ways, I found this discomfort a productive way to think from, and this is a skill that extends into fiction writing, where, as writers we need to examine topics from multiple perspectives, creating characters whose morality doesn't align with our own. It focuses the mind on the shifting nature of perspectives, words, meaning and context. From a practical standpoint, the bonus of using erasure poetry within a workshop setting is that very little is required beyond a pen or a computer (depending on participants' access or their preferences). Another thing to note is that, should erasure technique be employed pedagogically, the workshop may need to be pinned by a common ideological standpoint, feminist, anti-racist etc.

Regarding my reflections on the process, erasure poetry sits in a complicated place for me. Taking bell hooks' pedagogical practices of the 'mutually illuminating interplay of anticolonial, critical, and feminist pedagogies' as a guide, I'm not convinced that erasure poetry stands far enough away from the anticolonial, and that its potential to 'reinscribe systems of domination' (hooks 2014, p.10) is problematic. The first thing to note is the dopamine effect that comes from actively erasing patriarchal words. There is a sense that a magic trick is being performed in revealing hidden messages, and a thrill in the paradox that 'creative erasure involves adding layers to an existing' text (Le Cor 2018, p306). As the redaction of

words takes place, 'language slows down: each word in the poem is clarified, intensified and raised in stature' (Lea 2012, p.68), and that feels exciting. Yet what's hard to shake is the sense of violence that takes place in the act of redacting words. It's uncomfortable to admit, that this violence, enacted through the conflict of my own differing beliefs, feels, in the short term, quite satisfying. As though I've conquered an oppressor and somehow created a change in their belief system. Like June's return to Jezebel's Brothel, somehow, I've reaped my revenge on these damaging words. But this killing of words lacks the fluidity of repurposing that collage writing and cut-up poetry have. In butchering the sentences, I've become an oppressor myself. I'm left with the sense that it's all smoke and mirrors. No minds have been changed; Rowling's position remains unaltered. All I've done is buried my head in the sand. Perhaps then, erasure poetry is less suited to works of activist writing, and better used in rebirthing new appropriated poetry from other works of literature. Although, even then, I have an unease at the 'apparent cultural "vandalism" of erasing a treasured work of art to make a new one' (Cooney 2014, p.19). There may be 'no collage without theft' (Clover 2011, p.93), but I prefer my collage without death.

Within the umbrella of collage practice, I have found cut-up poetry to be a more constructive way to approach activist writing. To demonstrate this, I used two Daily Mail articles, detailing Tory accusations of Angela Raynor employing "Basic Instinct" tactics to distract Boris Johnson during Prime Minister's Questions. The full misogynist contents of both articles can be found [HERE](#) and [HERE](#). I broke the articles down into key words and formed together a poem to reappropriate the words, challenging the misogynist articles and making 'visible the conspiracy that sustains them' (Harris 2019, p.28). As with the erasure exercise, this forced me to use words and language from a viewpoint I would not ordinarily choose to write from. Subsequently the composition felt confronting in its initiation. As with all collage work, it's an exercise in having to make the most of the

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resources in front of you. The exercise forced me to think about each word at my disposal, to really consider the words' meanings and their potential fluidity. This activity promotes close reading of text, and the restrictions of the process consequentially expose certain words in isolation; 'the words are experienced not only as signifiers but as objects in themselves' (Lea 2012, p.68). There is a quiet liberation in the reordering of the power dynamics at play, a pleasure at the

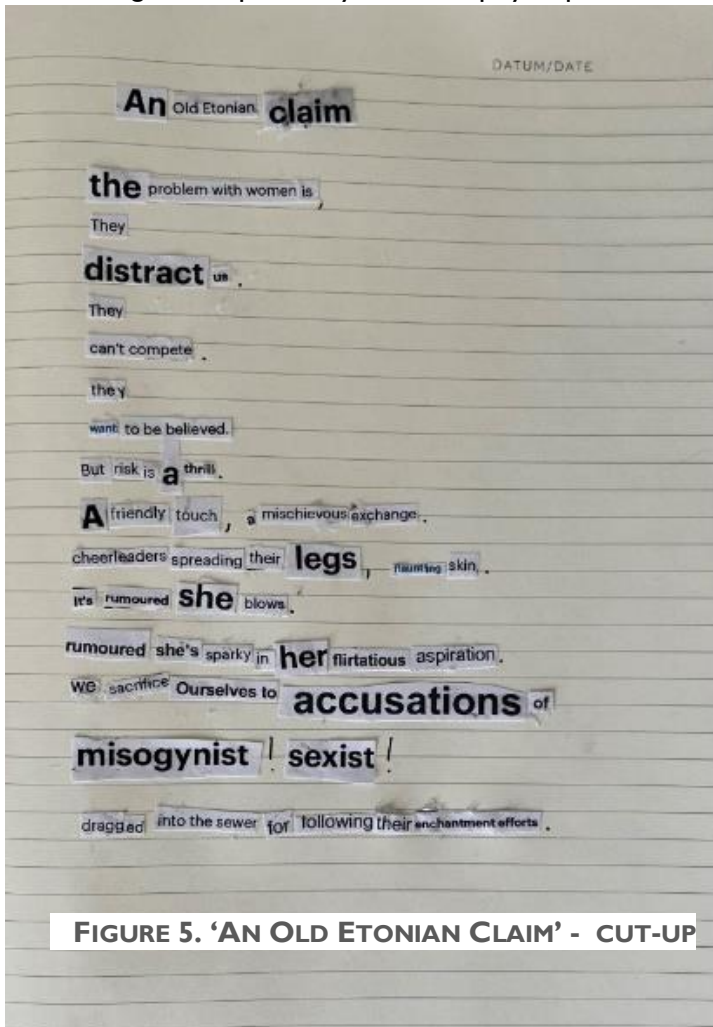


FIGURE 5. 'AN OLD ETONIAN CLAIM' - CUT-UP



realisation that these words can be rearranged and repurposed. But the danger with cut-up remains, there is a responsibility that comes with how the words are cut up and recycled.

### Collaged words: from feelings to meaning



**FIGURE 6. LEVY, D. & KLIMOWSKI, A. (2016) STARDUST NATION**

This final exercise demonstrates how collage can be used 'as a means of accessing, exploring, and making explicit various aspects of unconscious, embodied knowledge' (Sim & Dal 2013, p.3). I'd been reflecting on Bolton's (2011, p.100) assertion that 'our minds inaccessibly store our most distressing memories and thoughts' and how difficult it can be

for writers to relay emotions into narrative, in a way that succeeds in reflecting the complexities of human beings. I decided to revisit a particularly

difficult time in my early adulthood which culminated in a breakdown of depression and anxiety, an experience that now lives in my mind as a series of dislocated memories, complex feelings, blurred images, and blanks. Some of the 'memories' that aren't fully locked away, 'arrive instead.

Uninvited [...] crash[ing] through the sky' (Lev & Kli 2016, p.13), often just before I go to sleep. I wanted to use collage writing to create meaning out of this elusive archive of experience. To bring intangible emotions into a demonstrable body of words. Depression and anxiety come through to me like a suffocation of invisible layers of weight. Collage is so focused on the act of layering imagery, that I believe collage writing can be a powerful pedagogical tool in seeking to allegorise such complex experiences.

My first step was to journal any words that came to me when mentally revisiting those times. The words formed a messy, noisy, and haphazard collection, but the list also worked as an anchor. When it came to forming cohesion from the randomised words, I decided to draw on some techniques taught to us during this module. The first was Raymond Antrobus' use of creating a poetic volta, inspired by Hannah Lowe's poem *If you Believe: On Salmon Lane*. I felt that this would be a useful device through which to draw on the interchanging movement of emotive memories. The second was inspired by Francis Gilbert's exercise of writing a conversation between one part of yourself and another. I thought that this device would be fruitful in bridging the conversation between the person I am now, and the person who lived those distant memories before. The key verb through which to create this conversational volta was the word 'remember'. From here, I wrote out a short, disjointed dialogue between me and myself, collaging in the words from the list I'd written beforehand (this process is illustrated in the timelapse film fig.7, as a text message conversation between myself). In reality, I split this dialogue across a page, but this could also be typed using a split screen, to 'juxtapose multiple narratives with interplay between different streams [with] the possibility for contrasting or complementary narratives to reverberate with each other' (Smith 2012, p.111).

Once I had incorporated as many of the words as felt applicable, I began the process of knitting together, rewriting the phrases into a fragmented whole. I interchanged words

and tried to iron out the inevitable clichés (a couple remain) and I cut and pasted words from their original positioning into new lines, extending and heightening their meaning. After every edit, a collection of words that originally represented a collection of isolated and patchy memories, began to find comprehensible meaning. The exercise was not only healing, ‘writing is a powerful cure in its own right’ (Bolton 2011, p.100), it also developed my ability to find words and symbols for emotions and moods. This exercise is a very accessible way to bring collage writing into a writer’s workshop. The class would need to be handled by the tutor with sensitivity and with an awareness of the potential emotions that an exercise like this can disentomb. As with all writers’ workshops, other participants would also need to conduct themselves with consideration towards each other during the sharing process. The timelapse QR below shows my process, and fig.8 is the poem, Ash Piles, that was formed.



Figure 7. From Feelings to Meaning

## *Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

### Ash Piles

Remember the time you couldn't breathe?  
Ash piles and cartoon dreams.  
Eyes glared into mirrors,  
days spent at night.  
The dead weight of every thought  
hailed onto your chest.  
A pile of gravid papers.

Yes. I remember.

So, if you remember that,  
then you'll know that ache.  
The one so far down and fastened,  
leaking every tear into a secret pool of apathy.

And if you know that,  
then you'll remember the brain that galloped,  
and the mouth wired shut behind a fuchsia scarf.  
The panic of wandering words.

Mutterings.  
Mad woman mutterings  
waiting in the wings.  
Bony hips, perforating skin  
like trophies.  
Adrift attainment.  
Unfilled.  
Missing.

Remember the ones whose solicitous head-tilts  
turned you acerbic? The ones who, later  
gave up.

Chaos inside.  
Chaos outside.  
Unbridled hedonism.

Because, if it wasn't fun –  
then what was the point?

**FIGURE 8. FROM FEELINGS TO MEANING, FINAL POEM. ASH PILES**

Tzara said that ‘Art isn’t serious.’ Whether you’re a professional or amateur writer, art is of course, fundamentally serious: the time dedicated, the emotions drawn upon, the craft that is refined. But what I take to be Tzara’s meaning is that art is not haughty. I believe that the ways in which collage art can be incorporated into the craft of writing, and within workshops really works in endorsing this view and in stimulating imaginative engagement in ‘the serious play of writing’ (Gra, Goo & Lam 2005 p.13). Showcasing the influences of our own inbuilt bibliographies, cultural references and personal intersections should be something that all writers are encouraged to do. The ‘role of imitation and transformation’ (Cre & Myh 2012, p.62) is vital in writers learning their craft and developing their own authentic voice. This should be celebrated and nurtured by educators.

The interpretation of collage emboldens the ‘refutation of the romantic idea of art as the expression of creative genius, it amplifies ‘emergence’, that is the autonomous evolution of the text’, the ‘feeling that a piece of our writing is evolving in a way that we would never have anticipated (Smith 2012, p. 104). In bringing collage or cut-up methods into the writer’s workshop, practitioners can engage groups in activities that ‘involve a learning process’ that is a ‘wholly spontaneous, intuitive sharing of ideas, without any element of instruction or imbalance of authority between participants’ (Crume 2012, pp. 114-124). And collage is for all – both as forms of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. Dobson and Stephenson make the case that ‘children’s authentic creative writing can be nurtured by a community that promotes intertextuality and ‘hybridity’ and, although I have not had the opportunity to go out and test these pedagogical practices in wider contexts, I can attest from my own experience, and within some small group work I’ve taken part in, that workshop participants’ creative writing, irrespective of their age, should be thought ‘about in terms of their wider identities’ (Dob & Ste 2017, p.162). Assemblage works as a tangible mind map. And whilst ‘young writers are often very aware of, and enthusiastic about, incorporating visual design into their writing’ (Cre & Myh

2012, p. 70) the appeal of cut-up, or any other form of collage, as a pedagogical tool for creative writing could be very appealing to writers, of any age, who tend to think visually.

Collage can be 'either a noun or a verb', which centres its process on both 'an outcome of a product' and 'the process of designing' (Cre & Myh 2012, p. 66). The practice cultivates composition, in that it encourages choice and selection 'from among the options available' (Cre & Myh 2012, p. 82). These practices can reinforce writers' confidence in layering context and ideas, to curate and create a non-linear, complex whole. Whether writers' hesitations and 'blank page syndrome' are caused by perfectionism, self-consciousness, procrastination, fear of failure or fear of oneself (Hamand 2009), collage and cut-up can promote a space where writers feel 'inspired by other writers – not intimidated' (Hamand 2009, p.35). Collage techniques can unlock layers within writers, assisting them in navigating their own fluid identities and unlocking their authentic selves, 'that may sometimes be stored inaccessibly, especially at times of great need' (Bolton 2011, p.22). Collage promotes a practice of writing that negates intimidation, and allows writers to make things up, 'freed from the demand of creating "original" work' (Kraus 2018, p.49).

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**SHAPING STORIES  
THROUGH MULTIMODAL  
CREATIVE WRITING  
PEDAGOGIES RHYS BYROM**

**STORY SHAPE HACK | JOURNEY or BATTLE?**  
*[creative component] [a three-part series of short online video  
tutorials designed for YouTube Shorts/ TikTok/ Instagram Reels]*

Investigating Creative Writing & its value

[Episode I: THEORY]

	VIDEO	AUDIO
<b>FRAME</b>	[all images transposed onto a portrait blackboard background <sup>1</sup> ]	[voice-over commentary, minimalist music to accentuate]
1.	Blank double page of student exercise book [centre].	About to write a story? Got Blank Page Anxiety? Stop. Ask yourself two questions:
2.	Vector of oar [centre].	1. What do the <i>Odyssey</i> and <i>Moana</i> have in common? (Apart from oars)
3.	Vector of spear [centre].	2. What about the <i>Iliad</i> or <i>Squid Game</i> ? (Apart from rich old men commanding poor citizens to death)
4.	[text centre:] STORY SHAPE HACK: <i>Journey or Battle?</i> [1   THEORY]	Both pairs use a common story shape, which you can use too through this hack:
5.	[text centre:] 'There is no reason why the simple shapes of stories can't be fed into computers, they are beautiful shapes.' – Kurt Vonnegut.  Cut-out of Vonnegut [bottom right].	In 2017, the Computational Story Lab at the University of Vermont crunched 1,327 stories. They were trying to find the most common story shapes – those writer Kurt Vonnegut called "beautiful". They found 6. They were named after genres, fairy tales, and myths:
6.	Figure 4 from Reagan, et al. <i>The emotional arcs of stories are dominated by six basic shapes</i> [centre].	'Rags to Riches' (top left), its inverse of the 'Tragedy' (bottom left); centre we have 'Man in a Hole' flipped in the 'Icarus' shape below; and lastly, the 'Cinderella'

## Creative Power

		mode with its opposite labelled 'Oedipus'.
7.	<p>[text centre:]</p> <p>'Rags to riches' [rise]</p> <p>'Tragedy' [fall]</p> <p>'Man in a hole' [fall-rise]</p> <p>'Icarus' [rise-fall]</p> <p>'Cinderella' [rise-fall-rise]</p> <p>'Oedipus' [fall-rise-fall]</p>	They went onto explain how more complex narrative are often composed of a series of rises and falls.
8.	<p>Cut-out of Vonnegut [bottom right], his drawings of story shapes [centre left].</p>	Visually plotting the rise and fall of a story was inspired by the rejected Masters' thesis of Kurt Vonnegut, mentioned earlier. He drew story shapes on two axes: on the X, beginning to end; and Y, great fortune down to ill fortune. He later presented these ideas in public lectures (footage is available on YouTube, see the link in the description).
9.	<p>[text centre:]</p> <p>Cut-out of Queneau photograph strip [top left].</p> <p>[centre]</p> <p>Arrows annotate the covers of Homer's epic poems with 'battle' and 'journey' respectively.</p>	<p>Now, if we combine story shapes with the slightly Eurocentric words of French writer, Raymond Queneau, we can pursue two of these shapes further. Queneau said: 'one can easily classify all works of fiction either as descendants of the <i>Iliad</i> or of the <i>Odyssey</i>.' The <i>Iliad</i> being the account of a battle or the <i>Odyssey</i> telling a mythic journey home.</p> <p>Therefore, Queneau might argue that we could classify all narrative works as either a battle or a journey.</p>
10.	<p>[top centre:]</p> <p>Journey [rise-fall-rise]</p>	Here's what a journey and a battle might look like using Vonnegut's

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	<p>Journey and battle story shapes drawing using Vonnegut's axes and style [centre].</p> <p>[bottom centre:] Battle [fall-rise-fall]</p>	<p>axes. Journey: rise, fall, rise; battle: fall, rise, fall. Notice the similarities between these shapes and the 'Man in a hole' and 'Icarus' from Vonnegut and the team at CSL – two of the most common.</p> <p>It's worth saying here that Vonnegut later clarifies the 'Man' in the hole needn't be a man or even an individual. There is room for feminist protagonists in a hole and those trying to counter the Great Man of History myth with multiple protagonists in their stories.</p>
11.	<p>[text centre:] 'For sale: baby shoes. Never worn.' – Ernest Hemingway.</p> <p>Cut-out of Davis' <i>Collected Stories</i> [bottom right].</p>	<p>Before a quick quiz, one last introduction. Mini-sagas are stories under 100 words long. They belong to the microfiction family: they are the bigger sibling of the famous 6-word story attributed to Ernest Hemingway on screen (notice the fall, rise, fall battle shape in only 6 words). They're also the smaller relatives of drabbles (or stories under 250 words), a form experimented with by writers such as Lydia Davis. Read her <i>In a House Besieged</i> linked in the description for another battle shape. A modern technological cousin is the restraint offered by Twitterature, stories under the 280-character limit of Twitter. See the link the description of episode 3 for my own Twitterature thread.</p>
12.	<p>Vectors of oar and spear separated by text 'OR' [centre].</p>	<p>Here's the quiz: sort the following 3 mini-sagas – journey or battle?</p>

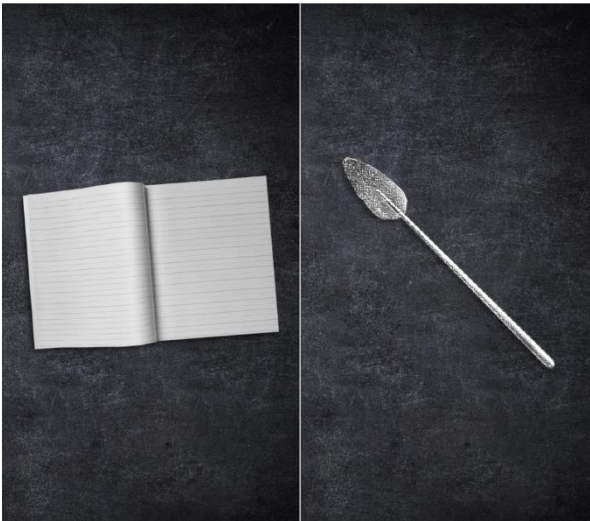
## Creative Power

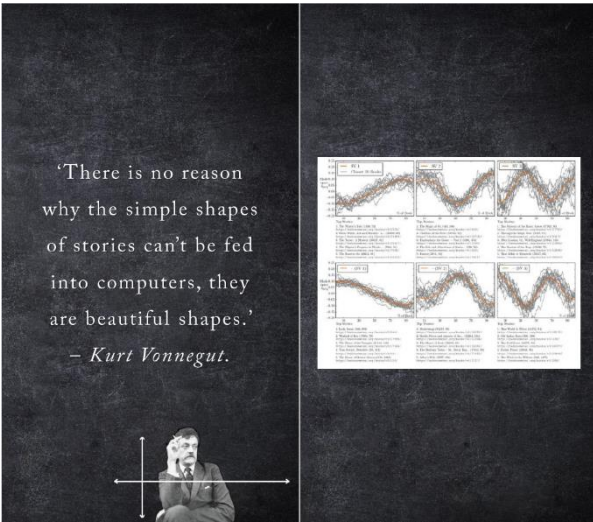
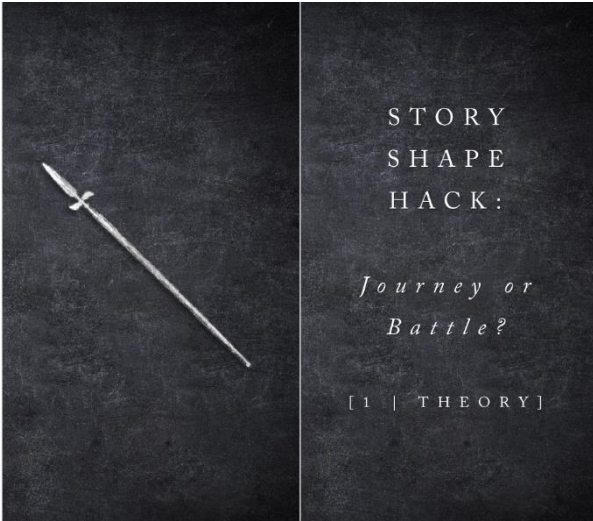
13.	<p>[text centre:] 1. 'Funds'</p> <p>A student finds a £10 note on the way to school. At lunch time, their friend is sad because they have no money left on their account. The student gives them the found money to buy overcooked vegetables and a stodgy pudding.</p>	<p>The first is a story about school and empathy.</p>
14.	<p>[text centre:] 2. 'An English Farce'</p> <p style="text-align: center;">I</p> <p>Teachers take Kidbrooke kids to a workshop in deep, dark Devon. Stonehenge is seen through two screens. Binned drafts hold untold truths.</p>	<p>Here's one from my own experience as a teacher.</p> <p>[pause for reading]</p> <p>Both shapes can be used for life writing as well as fiction, no matter how small the journey or how minor the battle. The battle can be physical or psychological and range from a minor inconvenience to a major event.</p>
15.	<p>[text centre:] 3. 'That Elevated Quickly'</p> <p>Every time they pushed the button, they thought they'd got away with it. Then a sleeve would appear through the gap. A snap decision: push or pull?</p>	<p>Last of all, an everyday thriller.</p>
16.	<p>[text centre:] 1. 'Funds' [Journey] 2. 'An English Farce' [Journey] 3. 'That Elevated Quickly' [Battle] [classification appears slowly]</p>	<p>What did you think? Here's what I thought:</p>
17.	<p>Relevant icons [centre], oar vector [pointing right beneath].</p>	<p>Like, subscribe, and get your oars ready for the first hack: the battle shape.</p>

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18.	[text top centre.] <i>Books to Binge:</i>  Recommended book covers below.	Interested in learning more about story shapes? Here's two quick book recommendations: Jane Alison's <i>Meander</i> , <i>Spiral</i> , <i>Explode</i> : <i>Design and Pattern in Narrative</i> explores natural patterns and feminist subversions of traditional story shapes and Mexican author Martin Solares has fun with much curlier shapes in <i>How to Draw a Novel</i> . Links in the description.
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[mock-ups of the video aspect: 1 image per frame]





# Investigating Creative Writing & its value

'Rags to riches' [*rise*]

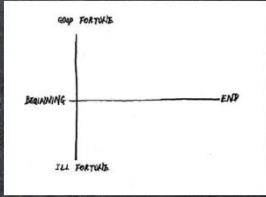


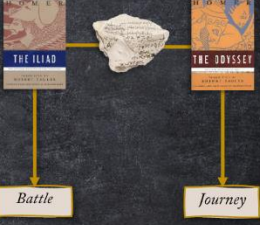
'Tragedy' [*fall*]

'Man in a hole' [*fall-rise*]

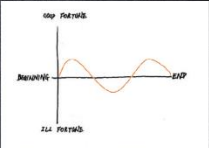
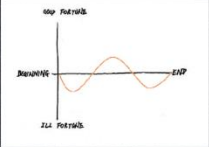
'Icarus' [*rise-fall*]

'Cinderella' [*rise-fall-rise*]

'Oedipus' [*fall-rise-fall*]

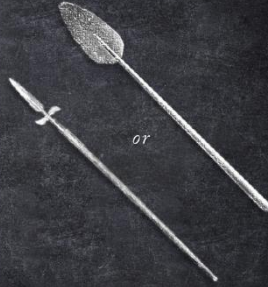
Journey [*rise-fall-rise*]

Battle [*fall-rise-fall*]



'For sale: baby shoes.  
Never worn.'  
— Ernest Hemingway.







1. 'Funds'

A student finds a £10 note  
on the way to school. At  
lunch time, their friend is  
sad because they have no  
money left on their  
account. The student gives  
them the found money to  
buy overcooked vegetables  
and a stodgy pudding.

2. 'An English Farce'

Teachers take Kidbrooke  
kids to a workshop in  
deep, dark Devon.  
Stonhenge is seen  
through two screens.  
Binned drafts hold untold  
truths.

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<p>3. <i>'That Elevated Quickly'</i></p> <p>Every time they pushed the button, they thought they'd got away with it.</p> <p>Then a sleeve would appear through the gap. A snap decision: push or pull?</p>	<p>1. <i>'Funds'</i></p> <p>[journey]</p> <p>2. <i>'An English Farce'</i></p> <p>[journey]</p> <p>3. <i>'That Elevated Quickly'</i></p> <p>[battle]</p>
<p></p> <p></p>	<p><i>Books to binge:</i></p> <p></p> <p></p>

### [Episode 2: JOURNEY]

## Creative Power

	VIDEO	AUDIO
<b>FRAME</b>	<i>[all images transposed onto portrait blackboard background]</i>	<i>[voice-over commentary; minimalist music to accentuate]</i>
1.	Cut-out of Vonnegut <i>[bottom right]</i> , his drawings of story shapes <i>[centre left]</i> .	Remember the story shapes drawn by Vonnegut?
2.	Journey story shape drawing using Vonnegut's axes and style <i>[centre]</i> .	Here's how we might draw the shape of a journey: rise, fall, rise. Rise of looking forward to getting somewhere: home or a special place; the fall of difficulties en route; the relieving rise of finally getting where you wanted to be.
3.	<i>[text centre:]</i> STORY SHAPE HACK: <i>Journey or Battle?</i> [2   JOURNEY]  Vector of our <i>[below text centre]</i> .	
4.	Thumbnails of videos <i>[triptych centre]</i> .	At one stage, I thought I'd make this three-part series a journey: a rise, a fall, a rise. Confidence making the first theory video, the miserable slog through the middle video, and the thirsty joy of the last video. Then I realised this naturally happened.  Anyway, here are 3 mini-sagas to exemplify this shape.
5.	<i>[text centre:]</i> 1. 'Doves' Walk  Cobden-Sanderson made 170 walks down to the river with his beloved metal type. Each time he	The first is based on a little-known piece of literary history concerning the destruction of a full typeface after its creators fell out.  <i>[pause for reading]</i>

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	<p>chucked them off Hammersmith bridge. Ironically, his partner was called 'Walker'.</p>	<p>Click the Wikipedia link in the description to find out more.</p>
6.	<p>[text centre:] 2. 'Kent to Bury Tale'</p> <p>A family travel from Kent to Bury, near Manchester, to bury their northern grandad, whose surname is Kent. The family don't know how to work their GPS. They end up in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, at the funeral of a southern grandad, whose surname is Manchester. And they say truth is stranger than fiction.</p>	<p>Here's a surreal one called 'Kent to Bury Tale' punning on Chaucer's pilgrims and British places names.</p> <p>[pause for reading]</p> <p>Here's a story that, though sad mood-wise, has the lift of a family together trying to celebrate the life of an elderly relative. This is short lived due to technological inefficiency which sets up the final comic relief as the world is turned upside down. In a slight departure, there is a fourth sentence in this one, an indulgent meta comment which shows you can experiment and expand these shapes.</p>
7.	<p>[text centre:] 3. 'Crescent'</p> <p>All the biological markers suggested love. Then they found out he was a farmer, but she was a hunter-gatherer. Opposites attract.</p>	<p>Our last example is a bit more abstract. It's also a little bit more ambiguous, showing that interpretation is as important as intent when it comes to story shapes.</p>
8.	<p>[text top left centre:] For young adults:  Recommended book covers below.  [text bottom right centre appears when discussed:] For adults:  Recommended book covers below.</p>	<p>Need inspiration? For young adults, <i>In the Sea There are Crocodiles</i> by Fabio Geda recounts the migration of a young Afghan refugee or Efuia Traore's <i>Children of the Quicksands</i> imagines a Nigerian girl's journey into her family's past and a mythic Yoruba landscape.</p>

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		For adults, why not try <i>An Orchestra of Minorities</i> in which Chigozie Obioma twists Igbo cosmology and a Cypriot odyssey or Margaret Atwood's <i>The Penelopiad</i> , a dark comedy about the women left abused or neglected during the Trojan War.
9.	Vector of oar pointing down [centre].	Our hack got you over your Blank Page Anxiety? Share your journey in the comments section.
10.	Relevant icons [centre], spear vector [pointing right beneath].	Like, subscribe, and put your armour on: next time we're exploring the battle shape.

### [Episode 3: BATTLE]

## Investigating Creative Writing & its value

	VIDEO	AUDIO
<b>FRAME</b>	<i>[all images transposed onto a portrait blackboard background]</i>	<i>[voice-over commentary; minimalist music to accentuate]</i>
1.	Journey story shape drawing using Vonnegut's axes and style [centre].	Remember our journey story shape? Rise, fall, rise? Let's turn the line upside down.
2.	Flipped line from image to illustrate battle shape [centre].	Upside down, you have the battle shape. Fall, rise, fall: the initial dread of heading into difficult circumstances, leaving comfort behind; the relief as the conflict begins to go well (as the old adage goes: 'history is written by the victors'); the survivor's guilt when you reflect on loss and change.
3.	<i>[text centre:]</i> STORY SHAPE HACK: <i>Journey or Battle?</i> [3   BATTLE]  Vector of spear <i>[below text centre]</i> .	
4.	Spear vector remains but snaps in half at the end of the frame's audio.	Fighting off trolls and keyboard warriors from the comments section has been its own battle this week: every rise is short lived.
5.	Spear vector bandaged back up.	Anyway, here are 3 mini-sagas to exemplify this shape.
6.	<i>[text centre:]</i> 1. 'How Hollywood Adapt Classics'.  B found the <i>Iliad</i> boring. The lists of 'son of x killed son of y' took a long time to care about. Eventually, things get interesting: Patroclus is killed, Achilles is enraged. Ultimately though, the payoff came	The first one is a bit of light satire on the movie industry as well as those that see repetition as the Achilles' heels of the Classics.  <i>[pause for reading]</i>  Boredom equals fall; death and anger equals rise; disappointing

## Creative Power

	500 pages into a 600 page but and by the end, B can't help but feel saddened that montage hasn't been around for a lot longer.	ending equals fall. B is a pretty dull character themselves.
7.	<p>[text centre:]</p> <p>2. 'Brek'</p> <p>On the eve of Brexit, cruise-liner holidaymakers are delayed several times. Eventually, a fight erupts over how to pronounce 'oregano'. They were still docked at breakfast.</p>	The satire in this one is slightly more heavy-handed as are the falls and rise.
8.	<p>[text centre:]</p> <p>3. 'Body Horror'</p> <p>Hiccough, hiccup, hicc-</p>	<p>Last up, we've got a very experimental mini-mini-saga, at only 2 and a half words long.</p> <p>Notice the initial horror of the 'cough', followed by the improvement of 'up', but ending with the uncertain disruption.</p>
9.	<p>[text top left centre:]</p> <p>For young adults:</p> <p>Recommended book covers below.</p> <p>[text bottom right centre appears when discussed:]</p> <p>For adults:</p> <p>Recommended book covers below.</p> <p>[appears centre when discussed:]</p> <p>Bonus book cover</p>	<p>Need inspiration for your battle stories? For young adults, try <i>Medusa</i>, Jessie Burton's wonderfully illustrated telling of the myth through the Gorgon's own eyes or <i>Persepolis</i> by Marjane Satrapi which shows the day-to-day conflict between a young Iranian girl's family and wider society.</p> <p>For adults, why not try Derek Walcott's <i>Omeros</i>: a Caribbean colonial conflict inspired by Homer or <i>Song of Achilles</i>, Madeleine Miller's queer retelling of the <i>Iliad</i> from the perspective of Patroclus.</p>

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		A bonus to celebrate the end of the series: Manjeet Mann's <i>The Crossing</i> weaves battle and journey shapes as a young British girl battles grief and identity while an Eritrean boy flees war. Links in the description.
10.	Vector of spear pointing down [centre].	Our hack got you over your Blank Page Anxiety? Share your battle in the comments section. For more experimental mini-sagas, click the link in the description to my Twitter thread.
11.	Relevant icons under spear vector [centre].	Like, subscribe, and let us know what story shape you'd like us to explore next.

### STORY SHAPE HACK | JOURNEY or BATTLE? [appendix]

[a twitter thread linked in the final video's description]

1/ Here are five early experiments with the mini-saga story shape hack. As you read each, try to figure out whether it is a battle or journey. Feel free to reply with your guesses, your own mini-sagas or your own story shapes.

2/ 'A Pessimist's Reaction to Wall Art in their New Overpriced Bedsit'

Live. Laugh. Love.

3/ 'Feed'

Attempting to learn, I read one story about Selma Hayek's body swelling during the menopause. Facebook then advertised 8 unfiltered bikini pictures showing her "comfortable in her own skin". Her face swelled over my feed until it obscured all posts of my family's dinner.



4/ 'Brown Boxes'

when I'm dead take me out in one of these brown boxes  
punctuate my day brown boxes roll brown boxes punch the  
sleazy A to Z smile on brown boxes break the goods inside  
brown boxes but never damage taxes brown boxes damaged  
goods inside and outside brown boxes

5/ 'Cornell's 3<sup>rd</sup> Breakdown in C Block'

They took notes during Cornell's breakdown at the lectern.  
They wrote questions in the left margin that the police might ask  
later. In the summary box below, they misspelt 'exploitation' as  
'burnout'.

6/ 'State of the Nation'

I had plans for a character to go on a journey back to their  
hometown. But then the government ordered a lockdown. No-  
one is sure what type of story they're in now.

**SHAPING STORIES THROUGH  
MULTIMODAL CREATIVE WRITING  
PEDAGOGIES [Academic Commentary]**

**Rationale:**

We shape stories and stories shape us. We shape technologies and technologies shape us.

Synthesising the thought of two avant-garde writers led to the premise of teaching story shapes through a multimodal pedagogical resource. Raymond Queneau's classification of modern stories as descendants of the Iliad or Odyssey (Charbonnier, 1997) – a battle or a journey – was mapped onto axes sketched in Kurt Vonnegut's rejected Masters' Anthropology dissertation on drawing story shapes (Marshall, 2019).

The impulse for this bricolage (Rogers, 2012) originated in learner-writers' fear of the blank page. Whilst in a learning setting, beginning to write is a relatively low-stakes activity. However, in an exam setting, the fear causes stress. As Gilbert prescribes, 'the problem of multimodal overload – having too much choice regarding what to write about and the many forms writing can take – can be circumnavigated if participants are given both autonomy and constraints.' (2022: 2) Therefore, the constraint of a story shape allows learner-writers to quickly plot ideas, offloading stress and allowing autonomy in the story's content. The story shape hack addresses a lack: 'There is a shape where a moment ago there was none.' (Elbow, 1998: 35). Or, more profoundly, there is 'a shape in the dimension of time - the shape of a set of changes occurring in a structure' (35) which allows learner-writers to build narrative and characters on the temporal construct. Furthermore, planning plot in limited words refines coherence of narrative and clarity of vision. Microfiction, paired with story shapes, can function

both as a short narrative form and a sketch for longer narratives.

Alongside the need for shape on the blank page of outdated, ideological exam papers, these multimodal creative writing pedagogical resources – a series of 3 short videos and linked Twitter thread – can feature within a scheme of work to teach story shapes. Such an approach is ‘an instructional strategy which combines a direct teacher explanation approach and a process approach for teaching narrative text structure’ (Gordon, 1989: 79). The videos were conceived as a creative writing stimulus alongside the teaching of Geda’s *In The Sea There are Crocodiles* (2012). Through the framework of the protagonist’s journey from Afghanistan to Italy, traditional narratives from each region are put ‘in conversation’ with the base text (AQA, 2021), achieving a sense of ‘hypertextuality’ (Genette, 1997: 5). Through similar writing stimuli, Daugherty’s research found that learner-writers ‘became proficient at identifying story components [...], not only in the basal text, but in stories chosen from the library’ (1989: 741). Therefore, through teaching story shapes, the learner-writer is discreetly and discreetly taught the presence of such shapes in literary texts. This is necessary as ‘some may believe that knowledge of story structure develops naturally through exposure to literature. Our findings, however, show that exposure alone is not sufficient to develop this strategic knowledge to the degree possible’. (Stevens et al, 2010: 186)

Overall, these resources aim to counter Rosen’s assertion: ‘to promote form as the starting point of writing denies the existential, cultural and ideological purposes of writing’ (2005: 196). Instead, teaching – and writing-with – story shapes can emphasise cultural practices, ideological undercurrents, and the existential imperative of storytelling.

### **Research:**

... educationalists everywhere have become aware of the increasing role of visual communication in learning materials of

various kinds, and they are asking themselves what kind of maps, charts, diagrams, pictures and forms of layout will be most effective for learning. (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006: 14)

Underlying text structures have been inquired into since Aristotle, codified by structuralists, and recently drawn by Alison (2019) and Solares (2015). Such theorists mapped, charted, and diagrammed idealised versions of story shapes. Below is a brief history of story shapes.

For Aristotle (1996: 1450b), stories have 3 acts:

1. beginning
2. middle
3. end

Influenced by Horace and Shakespeare, Freytag's Pyramid (1900: 114-115) shapes the tension experienced by an audience into 5 acts:

1. exposition
2. an inciting incident leading to rising tension
3. a climax
4. falling tension
5. resolution

Syd Field's 3 Act Structure re-simplified narrative into:

1. Setup
2. Confrontation
3. Resolution (Yorke, 2014: 43)

According to Yorke, this structure's appeal lies in the mock-Hegelian thesis/ antithesis/ synthesis or action/ reaction/ turning point (2014: 45-47 & 106).

Following Freytag's shaping, Frye (1982: 2-3) isolated two shapes:

1. U (comedy)
2. ∩ (tragedy)

Using Vonnegut's vocabulary, comedy therefore falls then rises whereas tragedy rises before a fall. The symmetry of both shapes suggests many stories are broadly palindromic (Alison, 2019; Fishelov, 2019; Yorke, 2014): chiasmic (or ring) patterns – A, B, B', A' – are found in Ancient Greek literature, Abrahamic religious texts and epics, such as *Beowulf* and *Paradise Lost* (Gentili, 1998). Within these broad strokes, however, are finer recursive fractals: the ABACABA pattern found across disciplines such as music, literature and maths, as well as in natural phenomena like trees and plants (Yorke, 2014). Assembling Frye's 'U's with fractal patterns over a 3 part structure led to two shapes: a rise-fall-rise mimicking the shape of a journey narrative and the fall-rise-fall, a battle narrative. (Such patterns also influenced the opening two lines of this academic commentary.) Similarly, these lines of best fit correlate with Vonnegut's 'Man in a Hole' and 'Icarus' respectively.

As well as common story shapes, the common elements of narrative have been explored by narratologists. Developing Levi Strauss (1974) and fellow structuralists' identification of mythemes (features of narrative present in myths from across the world), folklorists such as Propp analysed the syntagma (basic structural elements) of narratives, delineating 31 'functions' in Russian folk tales (2009: 64). The intricacies of such morphologies, like that of Campbell's *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2012), are likely too numerous for learner-writers to be able to remember, thus implement, in exam conditions, hence such approaches were avoided. Similarly, choosing between the 7 plots codified in Booker's analysis (2005) might also overload the learner-writer. Consequently, Queneau's two story classification guided the reduction to the journey and battle shapes. Nevertheless, each of these approaches could be criticised as Eurocentric, masculinist, and individualistic (as argued in the later 'Review' section). Moreover, Koenitz et al's neostructuralist research challenged the ubiquity of narrative models such as the Hero's journey, and its antecedents schematised by practitioners of

comparative mythologies, ironically describing the universality of such shapes as being a 'myth' (2018: 12). They noted several structures such as Kishōtenketsu, a conflict-free narrative structure originating in Chinese poetry and widely used in Korean and Japanese writing; the Robleto, a Nicaraguan narrative structure defined by a notable line of repetition; and frame narrative structures from the Indo-Arab literary and oral traditions which feature two to three distinct diegetic levels. These particular narrative structures clearly demonstrate that viable alternatives exist and thus they already serve to expose the fallacy of assigning universal status to the Monomyth and the dramatic arc. (5)

Therefore, without the basis of a positivistic universal narrative model, the two story shapes were utilised to test Queneau's proclamation and pursued due to their correlation with the other texts recommended in the 'Story Shape Hack' videos, with commentary mitigating the 'culturally specific, and power-inscribed' elements. (Kinchloe, 2001: 689).

### **Realisation:**

The ethics and aesthetics of the online videos in 'Story Shape Hacks' were influenced by philosophical, political, and social theory channels such as PlasticPills, Then & Now, and ContraPoints as well as wider-reaching informative channels curated by TED-Ed, CrashCourse, The School of Life, or BBC Radio 4's History of Ideas. The proliferation of online media and ease of access allows for commoning knowledge and levelling the walls of a classroom, as well as promoting lifelong creativity and learning (Mößner and Kitcher, 2017). Multimodal knowledge therefore promotes cultural capital for learner-writers: narratives are foundational to many forms of communication; hence potential social justice issues arise if students are not taught these elements. (Stevens et al. 2010: 164).

Similarly,[f]or the current generation of students, engagement in digital media is an everyday practice, from reading and viewing content to writing and disseminating content. A significant pedagogical digital divide remains, however, between these students' digital practices, and the approaches to communication taught in classrooms (Hundley & Holbrook, 2013). It is important not only that educators and teachers develop pedagogical tools and approaches to address communications in these new media, but also that we understand the fundamental, cognitive differences between writing for the page and writing for digital media. (Skains, 2017: 106)

A 3-part 'grammar' (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006: 1), itself a story shape, often found in short tutorials structured each episode: a rhetorical introduction to link concepts; examples to illustrate; a chance for learner-writers to produce content and subscribe to engage with further videos. Fostering a community of writers is potentialised by the latter grammeme. As Gordon argues, this would provide 'necessary social context for input on the basis of unique abilities, for greater risk taking [...] and for active involvement in one's own learning through sharing and feedback.' (1989: 81)

Each episode has a nested 'fictional script' of mini-sagas inside a frame 'teaching script' (Gilbert, 2022: 6). Mini-sagas, a form of microfiction, in both video and the Twitterature thread allowed complex story shapes to be exemplified in a short form: most examples include 3 sentences concisely accentuating the rise and fall of each story shape.

Writing multimodal resources embraces 'new tools' (Barnard, 2019: 5) and a 'creative flexibility' (1) as [m]ultimodal writing practice involves being able to relatively quickly and accurately assess and delineate the particular codes, conventions and constraints of a new medium (38)

The Twitterature thread was included because, as Barnard (2016) notes:

A Pearson survey [...] 82.5% of set group assignments were created as blogs or Wikis, just 7.0% were created using Twitter (4)

This is [i]n spite of calls for more digital engagement and the fact that students are arriving on campus with digitally connected skills, creative writing classrooms are generally “low tech and quaintly humanistic”. (Taylor Suchy, 2013: 1)

Additionally, microfiction ‘could help motivate the students to, quite simply, start. Many writers have spoken of the difficult moment when they face a blank page’ (Barnard, 2016: 6), the starting point of this project.

Theoretically, combining multimodal teaching and microfiction creates ‘technologies for eliciting children’s funds of knowledge’ (Thomson and Hall, 2008: 98). An important development as [the national curriculum] provides little official opening for family, local and community knowledges, despite ongoing research which suggests that the inclusion of such ‘funds’ can be important ‘scaffolding’ for children whose languages, heritages and ways of being in the world are not those valued in schooling. (87)

Hence multimodal creative writing pedagogies offer social justice and cultural capital within a creative community.

Similarly, the multimodal approach allowed for me to remediate (Barnard, 2017) my own writing practice and include my own funds of knowledge, especially in ‘An English Farce’, the microfiction about a creative writing retreat I attend with pupils. Writing these microfictions for a potential wide audience of learner-writers – from school students to everyday internet users – posed a challenge. Selecting accessible content and language was a constraint but eventually allowed for much clearer and paired-back writing than my original test set.

Writing a script for an online video and faking a Twitter thread fulfils Barnard’s demand upon teacher-writers and learner-



writers alike to 'become multimodal writers, that is, flexible enough in their creative practice to be able to move between different types of writing for different modes of dissemination often within small time frames'. (2016: 13) Using this multimodal approach led me to develop 'technoliteracies' (Edwards-Graves, 2011: 50) through awareness of 'semiotic patterns across modes' (Hull and Nelson, 2005: 236) and create a concise vocabulary to represent visual elements textually.

### **Review:**

The bricolage of these concepts into a multimodal form could be criticised in several ways. A particular notion that challenged my research into narratives was Strawson's negation of the primacy or reality of narrative shaping episodic events (2018). Unlike Rosen who states: 'Narrative is a primary act of mind. It is a seemingly genetic characteristic or at least common to all cultures. We deduce from this that we all need to be narrators in our daily lives' (2005: 195), Strawson argues linear narrative could be culturally rather than psychologically imposed. Therefore, dependant on engagement with a demographic interested in complex concepts, the series could continue by discussing the narrative impulse and alternatives to the linear story.

A similar concern throughout this project was how the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* feature individualist – often masculinist – 'heroic' narratives, excluding 'literature from below' (Vargo, 2016: 439 [after 'history from below' (Thompson, 1966: 279)]). The Great Man of History paradigm is furthered by Campbell's *Hero with A Thousand Faces* (2012) and Booker's *The Seven Basic Plots* (2005) whose proffered plots predominantly centre around a protagonist's heroics. Consequently, the possibility of writing-against this standard with journey and battle shapes was explicitly addressed in Episode I: several characters can embark on a journey together (see Faulker's *As I Lay Dying* [1996] or its offspring, Swift's *Last Orders* [2010]) or battles can be told from multiple perspectives, not all male and 'heroic' (for instance, two feminist retellings of the Trojan War: Barker's

The Silence of the Girls [2019] and Haynes' A Thousand Ships [2020]). A feminist-inspired alternative to the 'masculo-sexual' delayed climax of Aristotelian dramatic arc were the wave-like shapes, with their rises and falls, directly influenced by Alison's research into natural metaphors to describe story shape (2019: 13).

Similarly, promoting two story shapes found in Western literature predominantly penned by white men could be critiqued from a post-colonial perspective. As Hampton and DeMartini note, 'the normalization of such settler-colonial narratives helps to construct a dominant shared social "reality" characterized by habitual "patterns of perception" which impede our ability to see, let alone consider alternatives' (2017: 250). Concurrently, promoting only two shapes risks telling a single story in which many readers and writers may feel unrepresented, as diagnosed by Adichie (TED, 2009). Similarly, Le Guin argues that focusing on conflict-orientated models (Naimon, 2018) can dangerous outcomes, as Bruner (1996) notes "Our experience of human affairs comes to take the form of the narratives we use in telling about them". Story then has both epistemological and ontological implications in being human and human being. (Lewis et al, 2013: 478)

Nevertheless, foregrounding two story shapes, found across cultures (as the small data set of examples in the videos prove to some extent), is an example of Wittgenstein's ladder:

6.54. My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) (2003: 151)

or as Gordon remarks 'instruction in narrative text structure is an intermediary step, not an end in itself' (1989: 79). In time, learner-writers will be able to take a post-structuralist approach and appreciate fractals within the shapes and the vagaries of real stories – these short videos are meant to

introduce a simplified model in a reductive and constrained way as a first step on the ladder.

Ultimately, as White (1980) claims, for learner-writers and teacher-writers alike, 'to raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself' (5) which should be the goal of all pedagogies, especially multimodal creative writing pedagogies.

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# **HEALING CHILDHOOD TRAUMA Gabriella Sepsik**

## **USING CREATIVE WRITING TO HEAL CHILDHOOD TRAUMA AS A LATE-DIAGNOSED NEURODIVERGENT PERSON**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

As a toddler, I was always described as having a 100-watt bright smile. I was a curious, chatty and friendly kid, safe under my parents' guarding wings. There was no visible difference between my peers and me; if anything, I met the milestones faster than others. Then came nursery and kindergarten, and it all fell apart. These settings gave me trauma as my peers and carers recognised and turned my differences against me. Little did they know that my struggles stemmed from undiagnosed autism and, as it seems, ADHD. I grew up in Hungary, where the assumption was that the autism that exists is the Rain Man-type. Girls wouldn't get it. If you can communicate, you don't have it.

But I did have it. And it caused me severe PTSD, anxiety, and depression for years. It stopped me from being able to develop meaningful friendships and healthy relationships with teachers. I failed classes and had to retake exams. I was labelled lazy and inattentive. I was desperate to get out of the educational setting at age eighteen and vowed never to go back...Only to bite the bullet and apply to a Creative Writing BA in the hope of finding my voice.

Then, as a 27-year-old, grown woman with a failed relationship behind me, I finally found a general practitioner who listened to me and referred me for an autism assessment. I passed with flying colours and finally had the opportunity to process my experiences. I learned a lot from several therapists in the years to come. Still, most importantly, I realised that creative writing allows me to connect with myself at a new level. I penned a list of letters to myself in 2020 as part of my

submissions. It was a complicated process and required me to gain access to dark and scary thoughts I had previously boxed away.

#### **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The idea behind this course is to use therapeutic creative writing methods (Bolton, 2011) to heal childhood trauma caused by undiagnosed neurodiversity, e.g. Autism, ADHD, dyspraxia, etc.

There is a considerable number of neurodiverse adults who suffer from a set of mental health conditions (Mandy, 2022) (Eilidh Cage, 2018) and trauma (Kerns, et al., 2015) that is a result of struggling in school and social settings (Ratcliffe, et al., 2015) as a child (Pfeffer, 2016) as well as being lonely (Darren Hedley, 2018) and unable to create connections. These conditions include depression, anxiety (Jane Thierfeld Brown, 2016) and PTSD (Ofer Golan, 2021). The comorbidity of these conditions is still being researched (Claudia Carmassi, 2019). Very often, if the person remains undetected by caregivers, they will continue to struggle and are more likely to self-harm or have suicidal tendencies (Emily Widnall, 2022) (Darren Hedley, 2018).

As someone who experienced many of these issues and found relief in creative writing, I want to help others connect with their inner child and find ways to soothe the trauma experienced. I am not a psychologist, but I am hoping that my experiences and the research I did will allow me to give valuable tools to others like me. In the process, we can help each other heal and look past our history of social, physical, and mental abuse.

#### **PROPOSED CREATIVE WRITING METHODOLOGY:**

My main goal is to combine the Healer teacher approach and the activist teaching approach. I want to be a creative-fostering teacher (Cropley, 2001) for my peers. This will allow



participants to face the trauma they have experienced and help them achieve personal growth. I want to empower them by encouraging personal narratives (Mills, 2006) by giving a voice to a marginalised group. This will also contribute to decolonising literature from neurotypical experiences. I will focus on dialogic teaching (Fisher, 2011) rather than a one-sided relationship.

- As the group will have specific needs to make writing accessible for them, I will focus on the Pillars of Inclusion (Anon., dátum nélkül.):
- I will thrive in maintaining an inclusive environment:
- by addressing sensory needs, such as lights, sounds, textures
- By providing a hybrid learning environment via online and in-person
- By encouraging peer relationships and not grouping up people against their will
- By giving extra time for work and encouraging participation in discussions
- By providing a choice for end-of-course objectives and working with each individual toward their own goals
- Using rewards, praise and positive encouragement to develop a healthy relationship toward creative works
- by helping them to create memory aid, e.g. the self-reflecting journal, when their mental health stops them from remembering self-care
- by assisting them in developing healthy coping mechanisms and creating a foundation for which they can build on

## WORKSHOP DESIGN

### STRUCTURE OF A CLASS

The workshop is intended to be a hybrid learning experience to make it more accessible for neurodivergent and disabled people. During the registration process, there will be an

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anonymous questionnaire to determine the in-person and online attendance. I would ask whether the group would like an in-person presentation of their work at the end of the classes or if they would prefer a different format such as a Youtube live or an online magazine.

Besides, there will be questions on accessibility needs. When possible, these would be accommodated according to the pillars of inclusion. Some participants may live with anxiety, depression or physical limitations and struggle to attend in person. For them, there will be the opportunity to participate via Teams.

Allowing the participants to attend the course online gives them a chance to remain in an environment safe for them. It reduces the risk of sensory overloads, such as bright lights, crowds, etc. Participants will not be forced to keep the camera on, and they will also be able to communicate in a written form using the chat function instead of the spoken word.

For those who wish to attend in person, accommodations and safe space will be provided tailored to their needs to my best ability. The room could be darkened, dimmed, turned off, or fairy lights used to create a soothing atmosphere. I would have a hot drink station with some tea bags, hot chocolate and coffee sachets on display and some light snacks like cookies, biscuits, etc. Some people, like me, can stim by eating or be relaxed by some warm drink, so I find it essential to use it as a calming resource. I would add some fidget toys of different textures. Soft, hard, knobbly, squeazy and some glitter bottles. Each session will begin with a short meditation to help calm the mind. This will help release everyday worries and invite the participants to be present in the class.

After the two introductory sessions, each class will be running a theme. Each theme will introduce new forms of prompts, e.g. found objects, pictures, art, etc. We will learn to think about how these prompts could be used, do timed exercises, and hopefully share our work with each other. The aim is not to make people share their work but to present a safe

environment that will help them gain enough confidence in themselves and their work to introduce to their peers. There will be optional homework given out, but it will serve as more of a free extracurricular activity than something that must be presented and critiqued.

At the end of each session, there will be a similar meditation to help release all the trauma and allow participants to focus on the healing.

Each session will have in-session activities, writing prompts, and some light homework to come back with and recap at the beginning of the next lesson. Participants are not obliged to share their creative work. Still, they are encouraged in a safe environment. As a teacher, I would participate in all activities and share my pieces.

## LESSON PLANS

### **Lesson 1: Let's get together – Introduction to the course, getting to know each other and discussing the benefits of the course.**

A relaxed discussion of the inspiration behind the course and why people decided to participate. We will talk about the lesson layout and what to expect, as well as give advance notice of what prompts will be encouraged during the classes to provide advance notice to all participants. There won't be physical writing, but we might give a go to some fun verbal activities, group storytelling and such.

Before the meeting, I will ask everyone in advance to bring a personal artefact (Betsy Hubbard from *Two Writing Teachers*, 2016) along and share why it matters for them and what makes it comforting. It will make getting to know each other more personal. We will also use name tags as I see many people can forget names in anxiety-inducing social situations, and I don't want anyone to withdraw participation for fear of not knowing someone's name.

**Lesson 2: What is trauma, and how it can affect us? Discussing depression and anxiety and learning to self-regulate create a safe space for creativity.**

We will talk about our childhood experiences as undiagnosed children and the struggles of fitting into a neurotypical world. A group therapy session where we can share and learn about our similarities and differences, vent and just get it all out of our system. Participating is not compulsory; everyone can share as much or as little as they like.

Using Sadness, Fear, Anger and Disgust soft toys from the Inside Out movie to help share emotions regarding these experiences.

We then talk about affirmations as a way to regulate our everyday mood and we will come up with a personal affirmations list tailored to the individual.

(Disney,

2015)



**Lesson 3: introduction to prompted free-writing and diagraphing (Gilbert, 2021)**

Introduction to the nature of free-writing.

To get the creative juices flowing, we will begin the day by doing a verbal writing exercise with the group, such as Tall Tales (Fun Icebreaker Ideas & Activities, dátum nélkül.).

We will discuss the benefits of free-writing exercises, either prompted or unprompted. We will discuss tools that can help with this, such as timers, visual or digital.

We will proceed with free-writing exercises based on Peter Elbow's original paper (Elbow, 1973). We may be using word prompts as well to reflect on a certain feeling, like "loneliness", "sadness", and "shame".

We will then share and discuss our work. We then talk about diagraphing (Gilbert, 2021) and attempt to use this piece of writing as the base to show what kind of feelings they evoke in us while they are communicating those feelings said above.

**Lesson 4: Learning to use objects to inspire creative writing – e.g. childhood teddy, a necklace, an old train ticket, etc.**

The aim of the game here is to find inspiration with everyday objects and objects of sentimental value. We will refer to the personal artefacts here. Before the class, each participant will be encouraged to bring in 3 items.

Something dear to them from their childhood or adolescence. Something that they found around the house that puzzles them.

An object they found out and about. It could be a leaf, a lost thing, a receipt of someone's shopping

We will use these objects as the inspiration for the writing exercises this day. We will do three separate writing exercises for the three different objects, discuss each and every one of them and look at what feelings they invoke. This class is a bit less about the trauma and more about finding inspiration and distraction via objects and invoking childhood wonder and innocence. To wake the inner child and remind of us the kid that used to collect pebbles and sticks.

These are samples for lesson 4. The picture to the left is of a pentagram I made when I was about 10. I used a wire and brute force to bend it. I made it as a protection device against bullying.

## *Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

Below is a passport we found at our new place, 2 meters high in the gas meter cabinet. There were two of the same persons, and I find it puzzling why someone would hide passports so out of the way and then leave them behind. They are still in date.

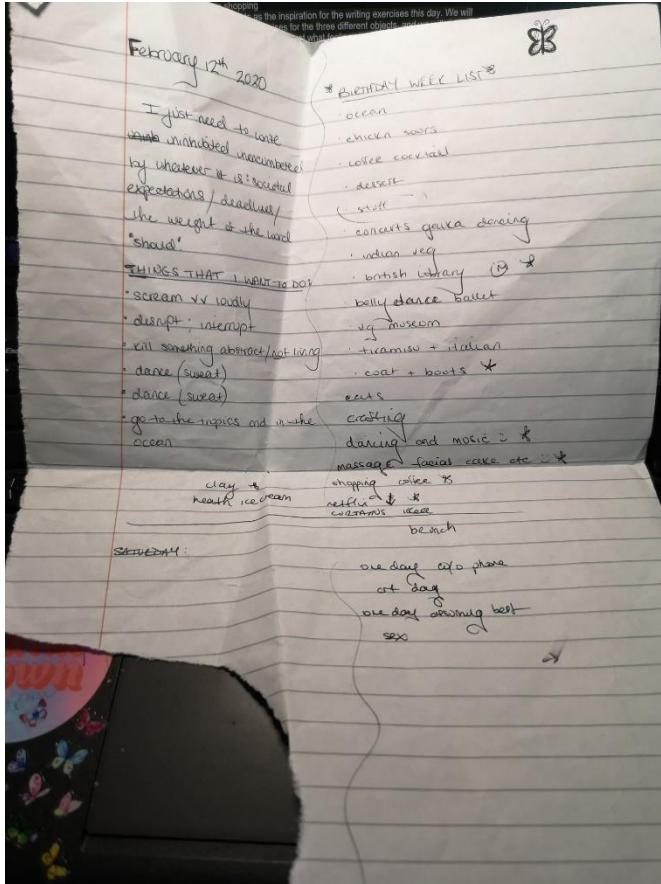
My found object for lesson 4 is a strange listicle and stream of consciousness. It was placed inside a book from the university library.



## Creative Power

### Lesson 5: Travel into another dimension – Using photos and art as a baseboard

This lesson's aim is to use pictures and art as therapeutic tools. Each participant will be encouraged to bring in a handful of childhood pictures and art that soothes them. The photos



don't have to be significant events, just events that may be important for the person.

We will use these pictures to travel back in time to meet with the person on them and talk through what may have happened at that time.

## *Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

We will use a dialogue style, such as internal family system therapy (Good Therapy, 2018), to facilitate the conversation between the adult and the child.

We will discuss these after the exercise.

Afterwards, we will use the artwork to find solace and discuss why those particular paintings, sculptures, etc., help us feel calm and serene. We will focus on building these into our writing habits to refer back to when we become distressed and upset. The calm in the eye of the storm, if you please.





**POTENTIAL TIME TRAVEL PICTURES TO USE IN  
LESSON 5:**



## **Lesson 6: Journaling**

Journaling has been around for a while and is often used by writers as a self-reflection tool (Bolton, 2011). Though I see it as valuable, I decided to alter it for my course based on how I have used mine.

My writing journal is a safe place where I can dump inspirational things I have found. I use postcards, stickers and scraps of paper, and I want to introduce this to other neurodivergent people too.

Instead of focusing on critical self-reflection, I propose to use it as a self-programming tool to combat bouts of depression and anxiety attacks. A way to connect with the inner self is by working on themed pages and using them as a dumping ground for anything that invokes inspiration in oneself.

So before the class, I will encourage the participants to observe their environment and seek out things that positively affect them. If they see a card, a newspaper advert or some old drawing they made, etc. Collect it all up before class.

Then, the next part of the class preparation is to get a journal. It could be plain or fancy. Doesn't matter. The content will be most relevant.

During class, we will discuss what inspires us and look into using our journal to store this inspiration for rainy days. We will discuss the journal as a tool for active creative meditation as the hands move but the brain is calm.

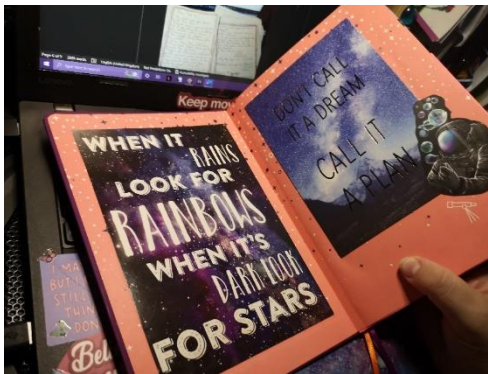
We will discuss mistakes and errors while working with the journal and how these could be remedied. There is no wrong way of journaling. Ultimately, we should all leave with a tool that will allow us to use them as an emergency self-programming tool, a soothing device. A safe space for positive affirmations. Please see below for examples.



You can see an example of stickers I would hand out to the left.

Below is a postcard I have found and a birthday card I received from a relative that I have found inspiring. Finally, a letter I wrote to myself hastily on a bad mental health day which I stuck into my self-inspiration journal as a pick me up on bad days. Further samples are on the next page.

A sample of an inspiration page regards my time-travelling sci-fi romance, *Starry Messenger*. I used scraps, stickers, post-it



notes, washi tapes, dictionary pieces and a little imagination. It took me 4 hours to create this, but it helped me connect with myself

and my story, and if I get stuck with writing, these pages will be there to inspire me to create art.



## Lesson 7: letter writing

Letter writing is fine art on its own. My proposal for the class is to discuss the epistolary form and how it could be used to better our mental health and eliminate evil thoughts. Gillie

use  
a



Bolton mentions (Bolton, 2011) the use of letters as a therapeutic form in her book *Write Yourself: Creative Writing and Personal*

Development (2011).

After this, I would encourage each attendant to think a little about the opportunity to become their own pen pals. The idea is to take moments from childhood that may have been stressful or traumatic to the child. Moments of loneliness, misunderstandings, or inability to make sense of the world. Then, I would ask everyone to think about what they wish people would have said to them in these difficult memories and then put them down into a letter.

Though the letter will be sent back to a traumatic stage in one's life, the fact that it is being sent will offer an opportunity to heal from that moment. It is similar to the time-travelling pictures exercise. Still, this time it is a one-way conversation with no response. Just a gentle letter, no possibility of conflict at all. Just a message to the past and a tool to become our own best friend.

## Lesson 8: Power of transformation

The main aim of this lesson is to go through the previously produced work, take anything troubling and traumatic, and do something with it. Instead of letting them mock us, we can seize control and take action.

My initial activity idea was to take writing based on trauma and tear it up and plant it away under a seed or a small plant. The inspiration was to make something good grow out of something terrible. A visible reminder that our trauma is not us and that there is healing and growing from it.

After discussing this idea, I received further suggestions from friends who appreciated the growing metaphor but suggested that they would do something a bit more violent with the past. This led me to offer an alternative option which involves scissors and chopping or tearing up the creative work and using it to create a collage.

Both options allow the creator to get physical with the trauma and contribute to processing it while emancipating the person at the same time.

At the end of the lesson, the idea is to regain complete control and learn that though we can't control the past, we can control what we do with our experiences. We have control over them and not them over us.

### **Lesson 9: Preparing for the creativity celebration – workshop 1**

These workshops are presented as an opportunity to either select some gems from the writing exercises created before or do new work. Everyone will have the chance to discuss their ideas and think about what they want to achieve. At this point, we can reconsider the form of the celebration, whether in person, on a Youtube live or in a magazine format. Either way, participants would have the final say. We would discuss what could be improved on the works and provide constructive criticism only if asked for. I will encourage each participant to remember this as the main aim is to empower, not bring down.

Lesson 10: Preparing for creativity celebration - workshop 2

Lesson 11: Creative Celebration

Depending on the group chosen, this may be a live event in person or online or a creative visual experience, such as an online magazine publication. Either way, the aim is to have fun and the confidence to present our work without the risk of stigma or failure.

## **Lesson 12: Feedback**

A relaxed feedback session on the classes as well as personal experiences. An opportunity will be given to connect with the participants and share social media handles for future friendships, as autistic and neurodivergent people may struggle to create lasting relationships. Ultimately, the aim is to leave feeling more connected to our inner self and others and empowered in our ability to create. Also, there will be cake.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

As mentioned above, the participants are vulnerable adults who experienced childhood trauma, so there might be moments where they struggle with some of the exercises.

None of the exercises is compulsory to do or share, but participants will be encouraged to do so. They can read it up or post it in the chat. If they do the latter, it could be left in a written form, or it could be read up by the course leader if permitted.

I am not a trained therapist, so I cannot offer medical solutions, but I want to be there if they want to expand or discuss their creative writing pieces. Providing a group of people who may have similar experiences means we can support each other through the shared trauma experience.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The purpose of the course is to soothe the inner child and the trauma and empower the adult with tools they can use to get better mentally. By equipping them with these coping mechanisms, I hope they can develop a healthy relationship with themselves and use writing as a self-regulatory tool. Hopefully, by the end of the sessions, they will feel more

valued and confident and leave with a new sense of wonder and connection to their inner child.

Though this is only in theory at the moment, I have begun discussing the idea with other neurodivergent people and I have had some offers to present this course idea to certain charities who may allow me to facilitate a trial of this course.

**EXERCISE SAMPLES:**

**Lesson 3 sample: Freewriting and diagraphing on the theme word "loneliness"**

I have spent every break on my own. Sometimes outside, something indoors. When I was out, I would often sit underneath the walnut tree on a top of a small hill. During the autumn time, when the leaves fell, it often felt a bit slippery. But I enjoyed cracking up the walnuts and eating the Inside of them, even if it was bitter. I would sit on the edge of the fence and watch the others running around, playing catch, chilling in their cliques. I didn't even try to join them anymore. After years of bullying and torment, I learned that I had no place on the playground. I had no friends. If I did make friends, they often turned on me once they heard the rumours about me

and realised how strange I was.

When not outside, I would often hide in the ladies' toilets downstairs. At the end of the cubicles, there was a gap between the windows and the last bathroom. That was my spot, overlooking the forbidden gardens in the middle of the school. I could admire the flowers, check out the butterflies in springtime



and observe as the students pass by on the other side of the



garden behind the glass partition. No one can bother me here. No one was there. perfect for some crying or wounds avoid the This was own personal sanctuary own personal



knew I  
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the  
above:

Diagrating  
example of  
writing  
exercise  
Lesson 4:  
Something that is dear to me from my childhood

I still remember the day I made this. I was about 10. It was a hot summer's day, and my parents were out leafletting and left us with our grandfather and uncle. I couldn't understand what my brothers were playing, so I spent the morning collecting snails and playing with them like barbies. They had their little house and goals in their lives. They were busy working and raising their snail kids...

Eventually, I got bored and started looking around the place. I found some knick-knacks and some equipment left from my uncle's toolbox. I had an idea.

At this point, I was obsessed with The Charmed tv-series and witches and remembered how they used pentagrams for protection. It was summer, and school was out, but I knew I would go through hell once we were back, so I thought, why not? I should make a protection charm for when school starts. So I used my bare hands to create this star. I always loved stars, and astronomy was an exceptional interest of mine.

Made sense for a star to be my protection sign. I scratched myself a few times while making it, as sometimes my grip slipped due to the sweat. But in the end, there it was, my own protection device against all the evil I could expect from my peers. Did it work? No, of course not. But I still have it; perhaps my life would have turned out much worse without it.

### **Lesson 5 – Exercise 1 - Travel back in time**

Oh, that famous 100-watt smile my mother always talked about. I was only two in this picture and was happy. Very happy. I was loved and understood and never made felt different. Mum said I was VERY chatty. Apparently, I would never shut up. I would approach just about anyone and tell them all about myself. My favourite pastime activities were mud kitchen, going to the library and eating good food. Pretty typical for a toddler. At this point, it didn't sink to me that I would struggle in social settings.



Sure, the nursery was rough, but most of my peers were still too shy and quiet to start bullying, so it seemed pretty relaxed and chill. This was a year before I went to kindergarten, where I would be

verbally abused and pushed outside.

But here, the innocence is still striking. When I feel sad or used to want to hurt myself, I try my best to think back to her. Full of life, full of joy, full of light. She is my inspiration still. She deserves to have the best life as an adult, and I will do anything to make her happy if she is happy, I am delighted.

I am sorry, little one, for all that you must endure, but know that we will come out strong. I love you.

**Lesson 5 – Exercise 2 – Using art as solace**

This picture from Vincent Van Gogh means the world to me. Stars have always fascinated me. I would cry when seeing a picture of star nurseries, also known as nebulas. I also have a bit of astigmatism in one of my eyes, so night time lights may blur. So, to see this picture makes me very happy as it reminds me of how I had seen the night sky before I had glasses to help me. It also reminds me of cloudy nights when I would try and observe the Perseid meteor shower but would struggle to see. Vincent was also depressed, you know. I have spent hours reading his letters and found solace in his words. We could have been great friends if we lived at the same time and were the same age. This picture reminds me that beauty could be born from pain. There is always something extraordinary in the world, even in dark times. One just has to look up to the sky.

## **Lesson 7 – Letter writing exercise**

Dear 14-year-old me,  
FINALLY. You left primary, and after 8 years of torment, you will have a chance to start over at a new school. You literally chose the one furthest away from your primary and have high hopes for year one, I know...

I hate to say it to you, but you will still have a hard time. There will be people who know you. People who will keep sharing the silly rumours about you. People who find enjoyment in hurting you.

But even worst, you will have to face a whole new beast. Teenage girls and their vanity and judgement of people like you. They will criticise your looks, your weight, your clothes. It will be hell. And the teachers won't be any better. You will develop a real beef with the maths and PE teachers. Both will fail you in the first year, and you will have to take a summer exam.

But it is not going to be all doom and gloom. For the first time in your life, you will have a few friends and even your own clique. These girls will not care about the stories others spun about you. They will care about the quirky girl you grew up to be. They won't mind your black clothes, the hair on your face or your strange and dark music taste. They will even tolerate your gothic poetry.

All I have to say is... Try and enjoy the time spent with friends. They are a good bunch, even if they are a little broken. Some of them will stay in your life for over fifteen years and become lifetime friends.

So just try and enjoy your time and ignore the naysayers. You got this, gurl.

I love you. X

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# **FREEWITING MY WAY OUT OF CULTURAL DISPLACEMENT: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY LAMIS BASRI**

## **INTRODUCTION**

I hope to use free-writing to connect to my heritage and find my identity in this autoethnographic study. The central argument is that the ethnic exclusion I faced from society has forced my feelings of displacement and resulted in my emotions toward 'lacking an identity.' The review of the evidence was based on pieces of free-writing drawing on my experiences as a person of mixed heritage.

If you've never come across the term autoethnography before, think of it as a combination of autobiography and ethnography. It is a controversial method that challenges researchers to describe and examine their personal experiences to understand their cultural experiences (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2010). Later on, I will provide more details about autoethnography.

At 18:14, October 15, 2021, I began writing a fictional autobiography. I didn't know why I wrote it, but it felt important nonetheless as feelings I repressed came forward. After a thorough reread of said writing, I noticed how much I struggled with the topic of belonging. Or, more specific, my lack of belonging. A closer look revealed that my struggle with identity and belonging mostly comes from my mixed heritage. The distinctions within each culture confused me as I tried to find myself in between. Each one is unique in its appearance, use of language and attitude. If one looks hard

enough, the only thing that combined them is religion, and even that was loosely interpreted in its practice.

I was born in the Eastern region of Saudi Arabia but moved to the West Coast when I was 6. Both regions are different and very much defined by their characteristics and attitudes alike. My mother's North African blood comes from Tunisia, Algeria and the travellers of Morocco. I hold a Tunisian nationality and continue to spend every single holiday there. I lived there for a short while as well. My father's family immigrated to Saudi from Indonesia. Though our Indonesian roots were frayed by the passage of time, the tribal houses of the Kingdom still consider us as immigrants. It's as if our Saudi passports hold no meaning. My family is what some might call International. My grandmother's surname literally translates to 'The Traveller' because that is what her ancestors were. I felt the same as them most times, like a nomad in my town.

At the end of this autoethnographic study, I will hopefully gain a better understanding of the problem.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

So, how do I uncover emotions? And how does my mixed background come into play? How can the process of creative writing help? These are the questions I find myself thinking about when gathering published data. I immersed myself in referencing the works of the most celebrated thinkers of this field. This paper used free-writing and colour theory as a foundation for uncovering emotions. In the context of writing, evidence suggests that those who use free-writing tend to be more reflective and deliberate (McKinney, 1976). They progress by confronting their fear and addressing their assumptions and learned beliefs (Cameron, Nairn and Higgins, 2009). Reflective writing practice is unguarded and insightful, so it enables people to see things they've never seen before (Elbow, 1998). To understand something, one has to look at it from another perspective (Bolton, 2010); with that in mind, I needed to look into the relationship between ethnicity,



identity and belonging. However, it is first necessary to review each term and its range of meanings.

Jeffrey Weeks notes that 'Identity is about belonging, [sic] about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others.' (Rutherford, 1998). But what about mixed-raced individuals? What we have in common with some makes us outsiders to others. We'll always be different, and we've never felt belonging. So, where does that leave us?

On a basic level, one can relate belonging to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. He theorized that individuals must first satisfy their lowermost basic needs to progress. Only then can they progress to their psychological needs, including the sense of belonging. He defined it as a social need for interpersonal relationships, such as the need for affiliation and being part of a group (McLeod, 2018).

Before going further, here are a few definitions. Webster defines identity as: 'The qualities, beliefs, etc. that make a particular person or group different from others.' In parallel, she defines ethnicity as: 'A particular ethnic affiliation or group.' Or more specifically, 'Of or relating to large groups of people classed according to common [sic] racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background.' (Webster, 2022).

Minorities in countries like the US and the UK resorted to adopting a racial identity based on the colour of their skin, whether by choice or not (Song, 2003). As can be seen in *The Colour of Humanity*, Bali Rai wrote, 'When did you negate almost every aspect of my humanity until all you had left was my skin tone? When did I stop being human first and start being black?' (Rai, 2016). Most have reclaimed their labels and based their identities within the confines of their race (Song, 2003). But people like me? We're wildly different shades of yellow, olive, and wheat. Our colouring has too wide a range. It would make no sense to use it for self-identification;

interestingly, Rai wrote, 'Humanity has no colour, brother. It did not start with a colour; [sic] it will not end with one.' (Rai, 2016).

According to Bulmer, an ethnic group is a grouping of people that share ancestry, symbolism, religion, kinship, language, nationality. They also share territory and physical appearance (Burgess, 1986). Based on that, I'm missing a lot of traits. I cannot identify as a North African nor as Asian due to my ethnically ambiguous appearance. I do not share common ancestry with the Saudis due to my family's immigration, nor do I share a kinship with them. So, where does that leave me? Should identify as an Arab? A Muslim? While both are somewhat true, I could never see myself identifying based on my language or religion. Such labels were too broad to culminate in finding one's identity.

Aspinall and Song reveal that one's ethnic/racial identity may be only one component of one's overall identity. In fact, it may not even be the most important piece (Aspinall and Song, 2013). So, this begs the question. Why do people -or more specifically, why have I- placed so much emphasis upon relating my heritage to finding my place in the world? Why are ethnic identities related to one's sense of self in the first place?

Let's focus on the topic of identity. Ballis-Lal argues that 'Identity is oriented to affiliations based upon consent, as well as social bonds based upon decent.' Ballis-Lal continues: 'Individuals and groups see themselves with respect to others in many different ways. Self-conception is a creative process, both changeable and self-interested although subject to constraints.' (Ballis-Lal, 1999).

Patel agrees with Ballis-Lal's argument and sees identity as a manufactured social construct. Racial identity is formed less by one's biological roots rather than their social relations (Patel, 2009). So if this is all some made-up notion, why does consent within these social bonds matter to one's standing within society?

'Claims to an ethnic identity may be significantly limited by different forms of overt and covert oppression.' (Song, 2003). This is true in the case of many, including myself, when compared to cases like the one found on page 142 of *Mixed Race Identities*, where Richard, aged 19, did not identify with any racial or ethnic group. It seems that as long as a person's heritage does not affect them in any way, they don't place their ethnicity as something central to their sense of self. They rely on other things like their home town for belonging<sup>2</sup>. By comparison, being mixed was a basis of identity for me because it has affected me in more ways than one (Aspinall and Song, 2013). On a smaller scale like school, the sense of being different from the natives was a daily reminder. On a wider scale, I was constantly asked, 'what are you?' on top of finding difficulty ticking those ethnicity boxes. Am I an African? An Asian? An Arab? A Middle Easterner? The choices were overwhelming as each respective group rejected me in one way or another. For lack of a better label, I found myself ticking the box 'other,' which sounds inhumane. Am I really an other?

Düttman bases recognition as 'the need for a self,' and 'the need of the self,' while Nietzsche describes the action of recognition as a change that affects otherness (García Düttmann, 2000). So if people are never recognized, does that mean they remain unchanged? Or do they become unwanted aberrations? In *Between Cultures*, Düttman resolves that in the absence of recognition, societies would fall. He states that 'Recognition does not leave the presupposed identity of the one who is to be recognized untouched.' When reading a Stanley Cavell essay, Düttman points to this. He adds that the absence of acknowledgement and not meeting the demands of recognition provides proof of something (García Düttmann, 2000). This gives reason to the indifference and rejection one feels when demanding recognition.

To quote Düttman's claim: 'Aiming for identity, recognition [sic] brings about non-identity.' Is it possible I confused myself by wanting recognition? He continued to say that demanding recognition only proves that the individual is not yet what they're meant to be, that they must show themselves to be something, and to assert themselves as individuals first (García Düttmann, 2000). Therefore, it is clear that my non-identity came from my need for recognition. And my need for recognition came about from facing continuous rejection.

## METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

The overall study was conducted between December 2021 and February 2022. The research was based on using autoethnography as a methodological approach. To quote Spry's proposition, 'human experience is chaotic and messy requiring a pluralism of discursive and interpretive methods.' (Muncy, 2014). I agree with this because, like that description, my life was messy and confusing to the point where I could no longer understand myself. Moreover, this autoethnographic study centres on how creative writing can be used to gain insight and perspective on the issues mentioned. It was carried out through data taken from samples I'd written in the form of free-writing, covering the nature of how it feels to be a mixed person in between borders. The close textual analysis will focus on the series of free-writes that are based on the countries I am most familiar with, either from living there or through an ancestral relation. I chose autoethnography as a method of research because it makes sense of past experiences (Brewer, 2000). It also allows us to tell a story that generates an explanation of why people do things in a certain way (Heller, 2008). Since this study focuses on my individual experiences, I felt it was the most suitable option to reveal and explain my feelings of displacement.

Before delving any deeper, let's unpack the term autoethnography. Autoethnography is the study of people in naturally accruing settings. It collects data by capturing the

social meaning and ordinary activities (Brewer, 2000). Dewilde describes ethnography as a mechanism that was intended to draw out patterns from ethnographic data. The exported data would be considered critically. It also aims to find how analysis connects to theory, relevance on a broader basis and generalization (Dewilde, 2019). Carrying out an ethnography allows deep insights into the meaning and patterns of everyday life (Hymes, 1996). Muncy adds that an honest autoethnographic study is extremely difficult since it generates a lot of self-doubts and emotional pain when confronting yourself (Muncy, 2010). I've faced mocking slurs, bullying and racial exclusion my whole life; I believed I could handle said confrontation.

In my household, we spoke three languages and looked different to most. I spent my childhood in Saudi public schools, where the distinction of ethnic groups was taken very seriously. Children of immigrants tended to group based on their common nationalities, rarely would anyone bond over shared interests. Such friendships were considered fleeting and much weaker than blood. In my school, only one other family shared my mixture of nationalities. Unlike me, they were lucky to have a tribal family name behind them; It boosted their status in the school. I did not have a significant surname. My family name was removed upon my grandfather's arrival to Saudi Arabia. The immigration officers tried to change it, and my grandfather refused, so our surname was cut off as a result.

At first, I jotted down these facts about my background, but they were insufficient. Those factors might have shaped me into the person I am today, but I required more data. Soon after, I decided to find my answers in the form of free-writing. I previously wondered how the process of writing would help me discover my emotions. Experts said that writing helps individuals suffering from social isolation to understand and control their feelings. I chose this approach because it allows people to clear their minds, recognize, and tune into their emotions. I was positive that free-writing would help me

understand my feelings, get to the root of the problem, and later resolve it. (Gosney, 2021).

When I began the process of free-writing, I set out to write with only one thought in mind, which is the name of the cities/countries I had a claim to. I did not know which direction my writing would go to, nor how many pages it would take. I focused on the name of the place then let my mind wander. In the end, I decided on 4 locations. I did not to hold myself to a rigid writing schedule so that the process would be as freeing as it can be. Upon my first reflection on the pieces, I tried to find common themes. This resulted in my habit of listing everything down in a notebook. Things like traditions, language, personality types, the weather, and much more emerged -all useful to the study but unhelpful to answering my argument- (Notes, 24/12/2021). So I stopped listing things and tried other methods, like looking at the number of pages I had written for each city and my use of language. I resorted to seeing the negative and positive connotations I associated with each city. A couple of days later, I tried another method. I dug deeper into the colours I had used when writing about each city. Surprisingly, it got me closest to my psyche.

#### DATA ANALYSIS

I wrote down my thoughts about each place in this order: Tunisia, Jeddah, Khobar, and Indonesia. I did not know why at first. Upon reflection, I based this order on my familiarity with each location. I soon added insights about my relationship with each city. I noticed that my writing tended to begin with a happy memory or thought. The positive prose would fuel my timeline for a short while until they soured with a negative enumeration of any sort. The narratives were often contradictory, which was in keeping with Spry's proposition about the messy nature of identities.

Tunis, Tunisia: 17:54 PM Monday, December 20, 2021. Penned in a Green colour. 3 pages.

(Mum's birthplace and where I shortly lived. I also spent every holiday over there).

Note: Often seen as an outsider through passive-aggressive derogatory comments. Constant need to defend my citizenship and belonging.

While I wrote three long pages about my relationship with this country, the words reveal almost nothing of note about my feelings of displacement. Moreover, I thought I had the strongest relationship with this country. Before analysing, I had theorized that the countries I had lived in the most would have more negative connotations than the rest. I was proven wrong since I only found one quote to reference in my free-writing.

The description started off positive, nostalgic and filled with happy childhood memories up until a bad memory was recalled. After that, the description began to vary. It went in a completely different direction. When the happy memories filled my writing, I reckoned I would continue to romanticize my experiences. Yet, I found myself talking about the Tunisians' politics, education, culture, and language. I described the Tunisians' behavioural patterns and their process of thought. I talked about their traditions and class divide. Only near the end of the first page did I reference the exclusion I experienced. For that, I used negative wording when stating the below.

'Being ripped off. It's having to prove your nationality to every taxi driver and shopkeeper alike. The people recoil at the mere hint of a tilting accent. They're relentless with their questioning and sharp with every interrogation.' - Page 1.

I used words like 'recoil' and 'relentless,' revealing the community's ceaseless actions. They tell of many instances when one was treated differently; when one was ostracised by daily micro-aggression to the point of being 'othered' (Hoque 2015).

Going back to Düttmann, demanding recognition proves that the individual is not yet what they're meant to be. However, this constant need for recognition only came about from being

viewed as a tourist in my own home and from having to prove my citizenship. Based on that, I couldn't assert myself as an individual first (García Düttmann, 2000). Comparing my experiences with Düttmann's theory left me perplexed. Is my need for recognition based on the aggression I've faced, or is it not?

Jeddah, KSA: 17:03 PM Wednesday, December 22, 2021.  
Penned in a Red colour. 4 pages.

(Permanent place of residence and where my father's family relocated to).

Note: Alienated by the community and faced racism in school.

The beginning of this piece conveyed feelings of being overwhelmed. As can be seen in this quote: 'It's being constantly lost in space and time.' - Page 4. Most of the wording was negative. Unlike the other cities, I immediately mentioned my feelings about belonging. For reference, check the following quote: 'Saudi is supposed to be my home, but it's not where I belong. This lack of belonging made me disassociate from it and had me not call it home.' - Page 4. The words convey a state of liminality that stuck with me for years. They tell of the disconnection I've felt from the city I lived in the most. It rendered me lost and unbound by the society that surrounded me. This feeling continued until I decided to separate myself from this community in my younger years. Reflecting on this now makes me question my choice. Did I separate myself from this community as an act of defence, or was it because of the struggle?

Another thing I noticed was the contrast between this city and the rest. Jeddah had alarmingly detailed pages and some of the worst memories and thoughts. Another thing was the mention of racism in the following quotes. 'It's going through public school and having constant fights. It's bullying and racial slurs that you take and never let go.' - Page 4.

'People hating white skin and making fun of everyone light. But it's also having old ladies desiring light skin and only marrying their sons off to someone who's absolutely white.' - Page 5.



'It's differentiating between city kids and villagers, between cities and regions as well. It's underlying racism that's divided between the talked about and the untold.' - Page 6.

These three extracts tell stories of how the community's racism is both outward and internalized. It also tells of how different generations deal with racism in a wider sense. There were references on how the way you look can affect your interactions with others, as well as how the city becomes divided by something as simple as an individual's physical appearance.

At this point, I began to notice that similar words were repeating in my writing. It can be seen in the next two quotes where I used words like 'different' and 'divide.'

'It's having a culture clash with everything different and having to adapt. But, it's also being divergent between the masses in silence unless told otherwise. It's knowing how to dress yourself [sic] in public and inside.' - Page 5.

'It's seeing a racial divide in both schools and the workplace, but also having everyone working together with a subtle harmony, unlike anything I've seen before.' - Page 6. The quotes talk about my need to adapt to survive. About how my differences had alienated me in both the school and the workplace. This led me to the discovery of a substantial pattern in this research. So I took another look at this piece and found three more extracts of note.

I found references to religion, traditions and a chameleon-like behaviour were added in my description of this city even though I was adamantly against basing my religion as an identification method during the start of this study. The only other city that shared this theme was Tunis, and even then, mentions of these topics were brief.

'It's a multi-cultural hub unlike any kind, mixing people of all ethnicities in one place due to their religion.' - Page 6.

The following extract emphasises my previous point about the pattern I had found. It shares the same survival-based behaviour.

‘It’s blending your personality between social classes and knowing when to say what. It’s easily being ex-communicated when doing something massively wrong; it’s about respect and upholding traditions and playing to the social norms, and it’s rebelling in small ways just enough to not cause upheaval and chaos.’ - Page 5.

I made a direct link between adapting my personality and my cultural identity. Based on this quote, one can easily see how diverging from the masses can influence backlash in the community, which directly leads to exclusion.

Khobar, KSA: 18:39 PM Wednesday, December 22, 2021.  
Penned in a Blue colour. 1 page.

(My birthplace and where I spent the first 6 years of my life).

Note: Very friendly place. Closed community. Considered as an outsider now.

On page 8 of my free-writing, the descriptions were very positive, nostalgic and homely. It was filled with picturesque memories. I talked about my connection to the place and how much I missed it. I used strong expressions like, ‘I long to go back there again.’. Out of all 4 cities, this was the only place which I expressed a desire to go back to. Mentions of a deep-rooted connection were declared as well as a comparison to how my life was when living in both Jeddah and Khobar.

There was nothing negative written about my life in Khobar. I theorize that this was affected by two factors. The first is that I did not spend enough time as an adult in this city for it to affect me negatively. The second is that I don’t remember much from my time there and that the memories I hold on to the most were largely positive. After all, people generally repress negative memories while they hold onto the positive, especially during childhood.

Considering the data above, it makes me think that this city is an outlier and isn't sufficient enough to regard it for the study. However, the 6 years I spent there were still a large chunk of my life. And the experiences I had there will always be a part of what shaped me. So, how can I possibly disregard it? Moreover, while I cling to the happy memories I had in there, it doesn't mean that I do not have any bad experiences. This only means that for 6 years, I did not have feelings of displacement regardless of being mixed. I also theorize that living in a closed international community boosted the fact that everyone was from a different background. And it did not matter where one comes from.

Indonesia: 18:57 PM Wednesday, December 22, 2021. Penned in a Black colour. 1 page.

(Where my father's family comes from).

Note: Never been there. Rejected for being mixed by the Saudi-Asian community.

Before this research, I never thought hard about how I felt about my 'homeland'. I've always reckoned it would be somewhat fond. I took pride in being a Jawa. Surprisingly though, my written account of this country revealed that it had the most negative connotations out of all four locations. It is also the second one that associated my feelings of displacement and mentioned the topic of belonging.

'Indonesia is where a part of my family is from. It's where I get most of my physical features from. Its the place my family and I would joke about where we'd get deported to if we were ever to be kicked out. It's the group of people whom I longed most to belong to, yet my mixed looks were never enough.' - Page 9.

Unlike the other cities, I talked a lot about my physical features and the negative events associated with the aforementioned descriptors. In the following quote, I ascertain that my mixed features were the main factor of the lack of acceptance to this community. It led me to use humour as a defence mechanism to deal with the exclusion. Moreover, I recall clinging to the

Asian community in my childhood to no avail. The next quote perfectly describes my many failed efforts of belonging to this community. 'I was never enough for the far-east Asians in my town, never full, never pure of blood.' - Page 9.

It also goes on to talk about the racism I faced in school. And how it shaped the exclusion I subsequently felt. 'I was left befuddled because kids at school would slant their eyes at me and call me by racial slurs, yet the Asian community would reject me for I wasn't enough.' - Page 9. The schools I went to was divided by race. It seemed to happen on its own. The kids would quickly form clicks based on their nationalities. And as I mentioned before, I had no one like me.

#### Extra Notes: Colour Theory

The colour coding of the free-writes became useful when trying to make sense of the complex data. An analysis of the pieces revealed that I unconsciously wrote about each country using a colour that evoked how I felt toward it. For instance, I used the colour green when writing about Tunisia. I've always felt the healing powers of being in Tunis, as well as the growth I gain when visiting. But I've also had a sense of isolation that comes from being excluded. Both the positive and negative connotations were considered a representation of the colour green in psychology.

As for Jeddah, it has always been hazardous to my mental health and stability, but it also houses my loved ones. My friends and family were always the people who gave me the most strength, so it makes sense that I used the colour red when writing about this place. It is a colour that is famous for representing love and anger. A person can become alert and stressed out when looking at this colour.

On the other hand, Khobar will forever have my loyalty as it was the most stable point in my life. Its calming energy is everything I crave. It's no wonder I used the colour blue when writing about it as it is often linked to peace and tranquillity and has the soothing effect of calmness (Van Braam, 2016).

And finally, I find Indonesia mysterious yet tainted with racial slurs and rejection. I chose the colour black when thinking about this country because of that. A closer look at this colour shows that it often evokes mystery. It also pushes people towards disappointment and the more negative aspects of life (Van Braam, 2017).

#### Final Thoughts:

In the end, I found that writing about my relationship with each city helped me connect to my emotions on a deeper level. For instance, I never expected to feel this negatively about Tunis and Indonesia. The level of negativity took me by surprise. I also learned that the exclusion and racism I faced led me to separate myself from Jeddah and cling to the notion of needing recognition. And while I thought I had the strongest relationship with Tunisia, I was surprised to note that it was Khobar instead.

#### CONCLUSION

This study tackled the complex construct of identity and its relationship to the concepts of mixed ethnicity and belonging. At the start of this study, I felt like I was lost and that I had nowhere to go but down because of the cultural rejection. I distinctly remember the degrading comments about my skin colour and how it was never 'white enough.' I've never been enough for any society.

The process of free-writing allowed me to uncover my emotions about each city. It helped me realise that these feelings of displacement were universal among people of mixed race since they naturally come from the negative impact of racial discrimination. This study enabled me to recognize that in my confusion, I managed to associate my feelings of lack of belonging with my 'non-identity.' While these two concepts connected in many aspects, they were different enough not to mix. I found that I needed to stop seeking recognition and find myself in other ways.

Writing also helped me shed delusions I've had about my ethnic background and explore my emotions in a judgement-free zone. It helped me understand that while an individual may take pride in something, it did not mean that they perceive it in a positive sense. The personal identity question is inter-subjective. I could not answer all of my research questions, but writing put me on a path of self-discovery, and I found that my multifaceted identity was finally beginning to take shape.

In conclusion, I found that the ethnic exclusion I faced from society did indeed force my feelings of displacement. However, it did not result in my lack of identity. It only contributed to it as a factor. I have come to realise that identity is forever changing. It's not about who we are, rather who we are not. I am not a Middle Easterner, and I am not one thing; my identity is as mixed as my bloodline, and that is okay.

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# **LESSONS IN INCLUSIVITY AND LEARNING DISABILITY: UTILISING DRAMA AND CREATIVE**

## **KYRA COLE**

### **Writing to Improve Classroom Dynamics**

My aim for the following three lessons was to create and use a textual artifact (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005: 27) along side drama activities (Coultras, 2006) to encourage empathy, situational awareness, understanding of choice as well as people's motivations and, principally, to impart a crucial moral lesson about behavior in a classroom community.

Every text is an artifact made for a specific use and setting and relates to the interests of its producers (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005: 27). I have utilized the medium of script writing to tell a story about Clumsy, who is struggling to read, to teach moral lessons in a classroom setting. It follows Aristotle's three act structure which begins in tension, escalates to confrontation, and then resolves. These three acts are then split into three days of activities centered around Clumsy's story. My target age group for these lessons would be 11–14 year olds who are coming into their identities and aware of social roles. The artifact also conforms to its producers, my, interests. Clumsy's story is not too dissimilar from my own, and my experience growing up as a dyslexic child invariably shapes my script artifact and its purpose. The script, to me, is not a simple recounting of events, but an emotional dynamic which still impacts me today. In sharing these experiences, through the proxy of Clumsy, I hope to improve the classroom life of students with learning disabilities and spark discussion about neurodiversity in schools.

In early childhood I struggled to read. I always felt a difference between me and my peers, who seemed to get everything so easily. I started to believe in my own inability and punished myself for mistakes, and slow pace, seeing them as roadblocks to my validity as a writer. Many dyslexic children tend to have lower educational self-esteem that peaks around middle school age, 11-14, and improves through high school, 15-18 (Burden, 2008: 194). The competitive environment at schools and emphasis on rankings encourage students to compare themselves to their peers rather than appreciate their own individual talents and weaknesses. It was when I was allowed to break the rules, through creative writing, that I became less judgmental of mistakes, and even began using them as creative leaps which would have never occur to me otherwise. I began wanting to teach other dyslexics, who also make a plethora of mistakes in the course of writing, this skill, I found so liberating. But in the exploration of my own school experiences, I realized there were deeper emotional lessons beyond getting inspiration from mistakes.

After six minutes of reflective writing (Bolton 2011), which came out as “teacher-me” giving a writing lesson to “younger-me”, I realized the teacher’s role in responding to mistakes was a priority concept I ought to explore. I leaned into the dialogue, and continued writing the reflective conversation (Bolton, 2011: 37) between teacher-me and younger-me. But teacher-me was very soft towards young-me and did not care too much about my mistakes. I was still not addressing my own childhood reading experiences and found it difficult to name or focus on one teacher from my past, so I started to dialogue with an archetype (Bolton, 2011: 230) of an unaware and intolerant teacher, Ms. Wrong.

The dialogue between Ms. Wrong and younger-me, who I named clumsy, was the basis for my three-act script. Bolton says utilizing dialogue “with an internal you can enable, venting, or discovery of feelings” (Bolton, 2011: 37) and producing the script between Ms. Wrong and Clumsy uncovered embarrassment, self-doubt, and fear my younger self

experienced but never put into words. My lesson idea about using mistakes to benefit one's writing was missing the crucial step of how these mistakes came to be viewed negatively in the first place. Self-efficacy is a measure of how someone perceives their own ability to complete a certain task (Lackaye and Magalit, 2008: 2-4). Clumsy's mistakes do not make her feel low self-efficacy, the teachers and students around her do, along with the competitive score-based atmosphere. How we expect ourselves to perform in a task are hypothesized to come from four paths of experience: 1) past ability in the same context, 2) vicarious learning experience (how others are doing), 3) access to verbal support from others, and 4) experience of emotional arousal during completion of the task. Low self-efficacy creates a loop of low achievement, where a challenging skill becomes even worse through self-doubt. Not surprisingly, learning disabled (LD) students have been found to have lower self-efficacy. This lower self-efficacy of LD students is not solely related to their previous ability in a subject, but also their access to support and their emotional experience during a task (Ibid.) I realized that Clumsy's story was not one that needed to be heard by dyslexics, but one that needed to be heard by teachers and other students without learning disabilities. My script could become a useful script artifact for teaching inclusivity.

I decided to supplement the script with drama activities as they could build up the students understanding about Clumsy, her peers, and Ms. Wrong. Drama and dialogue laid the solid foundation I needed to address children's reactions to a child with learning disabilities. There is a lasting intuition in English psychological and philosophical circles that drama is able to help with the cultivation of moral children, and in England plays in schools have been performed since schools were established at Winchester in the late fifteenth century, originally performed in Latin (Levy, 1997: 65). Engagement with drama is similar to experiencing real life "like a pilot's simulator, [it can] give a child, in a predictable, compressed, and repeatable form, a preview of the moral dilemmas he or she would encounter in living and practice

living through them honorably” (Levy, 1997: 66). The other aspect, which is often not addressed directly in classrooms, is that drama educates our feelings. Through proxy characters people are able to feel in a controlled environment (Levy, 1997: 71). Students experiencing Clumsy’s story may feel secondhand embarrassment or cringe at the way Ms. Wrong or Alice reacts to her and thus get them to grapple with the moral dilemma of by-standing an event of injustice against a LD student. These feelings will be familiar and recognizable to them in a real classroom situation where a teacher or student is unfair to another student or teacher and prompt them to act differently than Ms. Wrong and Alice towards those with learning disabilities.

A script format also asks students to imagine themselves as the characters within the story. And

“through their active involvement in drama, as audience or participants, young people can learn to know pity, admiration, indignation, repulsion by feeling them in particular contexts. They can thus learn, through participation and discussion, to recognize these feelings and the kind of social actions that inspire them” (Winston, 1999: 470).

Understanding how the feelings of others can be impacted by your action sets the stage for children to empathize with others and consider how their own actions affect the people around them. Often one will ‘represent their own moral experience [by] describ[ing] their respective responses to situations in which they had to decide what was the "right" thing to do, and do it’ (Tappan and Brown, 1989 :186). The characters in my, and any, script respond to their situation and give students the opportunity to consider if the character’s actions are right or wrong. Tappan and Brown got students to tell stories of their own personal moral experiences, but a major challenge of the project was it required too much vulnerability from students. Utilizing characters as moral discussion rods I give students a safe distance to be critical of actions shown within the script and enable them to be self-critical of their own responses to LD students.

## *Creative Power*

### Creative Piece

#### Lesson 1: Clumsy's first class

In all lessons move desks to the edges of the room, they can be used later as props, and have the class sit or stand in a circle during discussions.

Starter: For these two questions have students answer anonymously by covering their eyes and holding up their hands. Their votes will be written on the board so they can see how the class as a whole voted. Reveal results and ask, 'what questions do you have after this activity?'

Give ample time for students to respond, let silence stand for some time before interjecting.

Would you consider yourself a fast, average, or slow reader?  
I had an easy time learning how to read, agree or disagree?

Read script as a class:

Give students eight minutes, or another time limit, to collaboratively count and assign their roles. Tell them to form into an audience, who will listen to the script, and actors, who will read the script. The teacher should let students work out this distribution as much as possible. If need be the students can elect a leader to help with the process. Encourage students who choose to be actors to speak loudly and clearly, use props from the classroom, and follow the actions requested in the script. Encourage the audience to write single words representing the emotions they experience while observing.

Act 1:

A class of seven year olds yell and rush into class. Most find an open desk and become still. Clumsy jumps over the desk rail and bruises a leg. Clumsy can't sit still as the class begins.

Ms. That's Wrong: Today we will be reading a passage as a team! You all should be able to read these words by now.

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Sound out words you don't recognize. You will each say one word in the sentence so pay attention to your classmates and wait your turn. Alice will start, go down the row to the left, then from the next row we will go right and so on until we reach Zina in the right corner. Does anyone have any questions?

Clumsy: Why do we have to read it together?

Ms. That's Wrong: Because we need to practice reading words faster. Now everyone open your books to page five and start at the top. Ready Alice?

Alice: Ready Ms! The  
Bralik: Crow  
Carson: is  
Denzel: sitting Clumsy: is!

Ms. That's Wrong: No Clumsy. Pay attention to your classmates not your toes. What is the word?

Clumsy: is...I thought...

Ms. That's Wrong: No, wrong, that was Carson's word. Your word is 'in'. Now class what is the difference between in and is?

Alice raises her hand

Ms. That's Wrong: Yes Alice

Alice: in is one thing INside another thing. Is... well that just is.

Ms. That's Wrong: Good, exactly Alice. I know they are hard to define words. The real way we can tell the difference is that a crow can sit in a tree but cannot be one. Clumsy since you cannot pay attention leave yourself out but please read along with what your classmates say. I will read what we already did

and then Finn you will say the next word, okay? There are a few nods from Finn and even more from Alice. The crow is sitting IN

Clumsy bows her head as the class continues on.

Finn: a

G: tree

H: with

I: a

J: p..p.piece

K: of

L: cheese

M: in

N: its O: beak.

....

Clumsy tries to follow the words on the page but cannot keep up so starts looking at the wall, listening to the story.

Ms. That's Wrong: Okay everyone it is time for recess. Please get up and walk out in single file, no rushing the door. And Clumsy, come see me before you leave.

The children rush up to the door but start doing single file right at the last second.

Clumsy slowly walks to Ms. That's Wrong's desk.

Ms. That's Wrong: Clumsy, I can tell when you are not following along with the reading. I know it does not seem important right now, but you need to read and write. Do you know what happens to people who do not pay attention in school?

Clumsy: No.

Ms. That's Wrong: Well, nobody listens to them because they don't know anything.

Clumsy: I tried to pay attention, but they were going too fast.

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Ms. That's Wrong: It isn't nice to blame your classmates Clumsy. We all can't slow down just for you. I guess we could try giving you alone reading in the hall when we have group time... But I need you to read fast with the group by the end of the year.

Clumsy: Why do I need to read fast?

Ms. That's Wrong: Time is money clumsy. Nobody wants to hire someone who takes a year to read the company rules. You may go for recess now.

Clumsy goes out the door muttering

Clumsy: The crow is sitting. The crow is a tree with a piece of cheese

Ms. That's Wrong: What was that?

Clumsy: Nothing Ms

*End of Act I*

Comprehension questions: What did Ms. Wrong assume about clumsy when she could not keep up? Was this fair? How did Clumsy react to the assumptions about her? What would you be feeling as Clumsy's peer?

Dialogue: Split the students into two groups. One group will write a monologue in the voice of Ms. Wrong and the other group will write in the voice of Clumsy. A volunteer from each group will share their monologue one after the other.

Discussion: What tensions are occurring between these characters? What emotions are coming from each side?

The main goal of this lesson is to raise awareness about speeds of learning and create community understanding of these



different learners. Students all work at different paces and both teachers and students should avoid judgement and assumptions based on pace. What is the point of asking students to engage with the story of a character with learning disabilities in a moral way? Students with learning disabilities around preteen years have higher levels of loneliness and lower self-efficacy perceptions (Lackaye and Margalit, 2008). Seeing peers experience Clumsy's story and discuss it will allow other students with learning disabilities to have aspects of their own stories heard without putting themselves and their insecurities on display. Such lessons could decrease the sense of isolation one may have about being the only person in class with learning disabilities. The opening activity in lesson 1 gives students another anonymous chance to see their own struggles, in this case reading pace, are shared by others within the class. By highlighting the varied experience of students learning to read in class also foregrounds how students will see themselves in relation to Clumsy. Time is given for students to inquire and think about what the results of their vote say about their classroom community, asking facilitators to allow silence to hang so students are given time to process for themselves (Fisher, 2011: 78).

## Lesson 2: Left Behind

### Starter: Clumsy Role-on-the-wall

Draw an outline of a head and shoulders either on the board or a piece of paper. Ask students to write the lines Clumsy spoke in act 1 around the head. Now get students to write in the first person what the character is really thinking or feeling inside the head.

Read script as a class:

### Act 2:

The class comes in with high energy like last time. Clumsy in contrast comes to class with her head down. Clumsy sits at the back of the class behind Jam who is tall for his age. Clumsy hides from Ms. Wrong behind his head.

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Ms. Wrong: Hello class! Please, silence everyone.... Alright today we are going to be reading a picture book. This time I will pair you together. Each of you should read one page and pass the book for your partner to read the next page. If your partner is struggling with a certain part help them sound the words out. I will call out the pairs and, subsequently, you should move to your partner. Alice and Clumsy....

As the teacher calls out the other pairs. Alice finds Clumsy in the back of the class. She sits down and opens the picture book. Alice begins to read with no hesitation. She is reading so fast Clumsy cannot follow along, so she skips her eyes to the next page waiting for her to stop. She hesitates when Alice stops reading but starts trying to read, stammering.

Clumsy: there wa(were) three....b...b...bears who lived together in a.... hose of the-ir own

Alice: house Clumsy not hose Alice chuckles that does not make any sense Clumsy.

Look at the picture it's a house not a hose.

Clumsy: Yeah I see. Alice how do you look at the words and the picture at the same time.

Alice: Just look at the page you don't need to focus on one or the other.

Clumsy continues to read more slowly. Each word comes with a lot of struggle. Clumsy: Goldilocks found their home while walking in the wood. She knocked on the door, but there were

Alice is tapping her foot and looking at the clock. She interrupts Clumsy Alice: was

Clumsy: was no answer.

Alice: An-sir not answer Clumsy

Clumsy: Then why does it have a w?

Alice: Because it's silent. You've been reading for 5 minutes and only gotten through two sentences. Let me read it, you can follow.

Alice starts reading Clumsy's page very quickly and continues to read Clumsy the whole book. Clumsy turns red and hides her face in her arms as she listens to the rest of Goldilocks.

Ms. Wrong: Great job class! Most of you have become great readers. I want everyone to practice reading alone to yourselves gestures to a bookcase in the front of class. I will be around to check in with all of you.

Clumsy did not know what book to choose. She opened a few of the pages and choose a book with bigger words and more pictures. She flipped through all the pictures first, telling the story in her own mind while ignoring the words. Ms. Wrong comes to speak with her.

Ms. Wrong: Hey Clumsy you are turning those pages fast. When you were with Alice, I did not see you reading. When we have partners, it is important that we both do equal work.

Clumsy: She was... I'm sorry Ms. Wrong. I was looking at the pictures not reading.

Ms. Wrong: Do you like stories Clumsy? Do you want to hear what the pictures are about?

Clumsy: I love stories Ms. Wrong. It hurts my head to read them, but I do love hearing them.

Ms. Wrong: Okay how about this Clumsy please use your finger to point at the words as I read them aloud to you. Can you do that?

Clumsy: I think so if you don't go too fast.

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Ms. Wrong reads a slow pace and Clumsy's finger keeps up with the words. And by the end of the book clumsy is smiling. Ms. Wrong sees suddenly that Clumsy is not disengaged with the story.

Ms. Wrong: Very good Clumsy try to read it out loud to yourself now.

Clumsy: The same book Ms?

Ms. Wrong: Yes, you already know the story so try and use context to help you through.  
Keep using your finger as you go.

Clumsy does so. She is a lot slower than Ms. Wrong while reading but does much better than the page she was asked to read out earlier.

End of Act 2

Questions: What affect did Alice have on Clumsy? What do you think are Alice's motivations?

Advice Circle: Students sit in a circle and give Alice advice about what to do when paired with Clumsy.

Discussion: What positive affect could Alice have on Clumsy? Why might it be difficult to support a peer in the classroom?

The main goal of this lesson is to counteract the bystander effect and explore ways in which students can act toward peers with learning disabilities without making them feel lesser or excluded. When children share their decision making in narrative ways they show a 'moral experience [which] implies a complicated and complex interaction of cognitive (what she thought), affective (how she felt), and conative (what she did) dimensions' (Tappan and Brown, 1989: 187). All these levels of the characters are explored through supplemental activities in lesson two and three. Role-on-the-wall (Coultras, 2006)

allows students to consider what characters are thinking from what they have said in a script. Hot sitting (ibid) encourages them to consider the feelings of characters and how they may react to given lines of questions. Circle of advice (ibid) asks students to consider what characters do and what they should do through the task of giving advice. Advice that students give to Alice, on how she should work with Clumsy allows them to author their own reactions to a similar situation. A student authoring their own reactions to Clumsy can through this authoring become a moral agent of the story (Tappan and Brown, 1989: 192).

### Lesson 3: The freedom of creative writing

Starter: Give students six minutes to free write making clear they will not have to share what they write. Remind them not to edit as they go and to keep their pencils moving even if it means writing the same word over and over. Ask them: How did it feel? Did you have the urge to correct? What do you think about what you wrote?

Read script as a class:

Act 3:

Ms. Wrong: Okay class today is very exciting. We are going to be making our own stories!

Many students cheer and look around in anticipation. Clumsy looks scared but intrigued

We will not have any wrong answers today. The goal is to actually use the words we have been learning “bead” and “dead” to see how different they are. We will start easy by telling our stories out loud and after we can write them down and make a drawing. Try to use one of these words if you can.

Ms. Wrong directs all the students to sit down in a circle

I will start the story and then we will go clockwise she gestures the direction each of us will say the next phrase or part in the

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story. Once upon a time during a stormy night a man rode his horse into town.

Finn: He named his horse Doug.

A few of the children laugh

Han: Doug poops more than any horse he ever met, so instead of going through town center he rides on the edge of the fields.

Alice: He has come back to collect his dead grandmother's belongings.

Ms. Wrong: Great job using one of our words Alice. Bead would not work in that sentence would it Alice?

Alice: No, Ms., just because they look similar does not mean they mean the same thing.

Bralik: When he gets to his Grandmothers front door, he meets a girl he does not know.

David: She looked like an alien. Her head twice as big as any human he had seen.

Clumsy: 'You must be the grandson' she said with a deep booming voice.

Carson: 'yes' he said, but knew she would not believe him so he pulled out a blue bead from his pocket.

Denzel: her head grew a third eye which she used to look carefully at the bead.

Ms. Wrong: Great job everyone. What a fun story. Now all of you will use the colored paper at your desk and to write a story with our two words 'bead' and 'dead'

## *Creative Power*

Some kids move quickly to find their papers, others, confused, look around to see what their peers were doing and begin to copy them. Clumsy, somewhere between these reactions grabs a green piece of paper. She writes slowly but deliberately. As they work Ms. Wrong reflected on how well Clumsy was able to participate when they were just speaking the stories. She begins to realize Clumsy's attention was not the issue. After enough time Ms. Wrong goes to hear what Clumsy had written.

Ms. Wrong: can you read your paper out loud Clumsy?

Clumsy: Sure. My bead granma has bulls of beads sortid into calures. She feeds me beads, I take them home cupped in my moyth. But on the way bak home I c something dead beads in the gutter dropped from a small wrist covered in dirt. I leyn down to pik up the dead ones. But I bo not put them in my moyth. I hold them out in front of me all the way home they smell. Mum helps me put them in some viniger. We scrub with a clawth and I c the dead beads sparkle.

Ms. Wrong: Huh? I like this Clumsy, but how did the dead grandmother become a bead grandmother?

Clumsy: Well at first, I wrote the wrong word, but at the beginning you said there were no wrong answers so I just kept it.

Ms. Wrong: Clumsy I think you have written the most creative story of the class!

Clumsy smiles up at Ms. Wrong, she gets a new piece of paper and starts to write another.

Ms. Wrong: Just watch your spelling Clumsy and you could be a real writer. End of Act 3

Comprehension: What questions are you left with at the end of Clumsy's story? What did Ms. Wrong say that made

## *Investigating Creative Writing & its value*

Clumsy more confident? What affect might it have on other students?

How does clumsy feel by the end of this class?

What has changed?

Dialogue: Split the students into two groups. One group will hot-seat a student playing Ms. Wrong and the other group will hot-seat a student playing Clumsy. A volunteer from each group will improvise a discussion between Ms. Wrong and Clumsy using the knowledge they have built of the characters through hot-seating.

Discussion: How has the dynamic changed from the last time we preformed our monologues from the first class? What emotions are now present in the dialogue?

Final activity: Imagine Clumsy now has grown and is your age. What is she like? What advice would you give her about her time in school? – Allow volunteers to read

The main goal of this lesson is to utilize creative writing to allow freedom into classroom language, creating a space of no right answers where students can experiment. Setting up the class with free writing allows students to engage with the freedom that will be afforded Clumsy in Act 3. The free writing process takes students minds off of 'mistakes' and creates a vacuum where the words are not judged and creativity is boundless (Elbow, 1997: 5-7). Through allowing mistakes students can see the benefits of permitting bits of Clumsy into their writing.

### Pedagogy of Inclusion

A lesson about Clumsy taught in a manner that Clumsy herself could not participate would contradict and invalidate the entire moral lesson of Clumsy's story, which urges students and teachers to slow down and appreciate the unique contributions of students with learning disabilities. Clumsy is a rags to riches figure (Booker, 2017: 133) who is oppressed by the rigid teaching pedagogy of Ms. Wrong, symbolizing the



obsession with the test and teaching right answers. Thus, it was essential that all activities and presentations of the script contrasts Ms. Wrong's approach with a pedagogy of inclusion, patience, dialogue and no wrong answers.

The first step in my lessons, to move the desk to the edges of the classroom and form a circle, is the first site of an inclusive pedagogy which disrupts the power dynamic between teacher and student, bringing the teacher onto the same level with the rest of the class (Coultas, 2006: 102). Next the activities invite a dialogue, using open questions with no right answer to enable students to think out loud about complex and emotional ideas, as well as giving them space for them to voice their own questions and ideas throughout (Fisher, 2011: 79-81).

The choice to tell Clumsy's story as a script enables students who struggle with literacy as they are asked to speak, improvise, or listen rather than read off the page, and it is suited to students who have high energy by allowing movement around the classroom

(Coultas, 2006). Beyond this my lessons remember and appreciate that children with dyslexia need a multi-sensory approach to literature, in order that reading may become more than a purely decoding and ultimately frustrating exercise from them. Their motivation, comprehension and total experience of literacy is transformed by the three-dimensional approach that drama can offer (Roche, 2014)

Thus, the script and activities I have outlined can be done in such a way that Clumsy herself would be able to engage and enjoy a textual experience.

Lastly, I have used bell hook's idea that language can be a site for resistance hegemonic structures in relation to Clumsy's ability to disrupt what is considered 'correct,' allowing Clumsy's written words in the script to retain their unique spelling qualities. Standard english, as hook's argues, is a language of occupation which speaks over other languages, but black slaves 'took broken bits of English and made them into

a counterlanguage' (hooks, 20: 170). Space is made, especially when utilizing free writing (Elbow, 1997), for counterlanguages and new ways of using English to occur in the classroom. Maybe, given enough freedom and play, children can be encouraged to make their own languages and add to or resist standard English. Perhaps dyslexics, no dislexsicks, can allow ourselves to explore ways of spelling, and writing within the frame of English. Before any of this, however, we must first teach or learn patience and kindness to ourselves and other learners in the process of learning. Such emotional and situational lessons can be addressed best utilizing the tool of drama and Clumsy's narrative.

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# **THROWING ONE'S VOICE: RYAN WHATLEY**

*Can the aesthetic principles of graffiti have a potential benefit for the practicing poet?*

## **1.0 Literature Review**

### **1.1 Graffiti**

Graffiti presents the global citizens of villages, towns and cities with a moral geography (Mcauliffe, 2012; De Leeuw and Hunt, 2017). It exists between the sites of dwelling places and, occasionally, demarcates and destabilises the thresholds between world views. It is a tool for decolonising the urban British landscape (Dang, 2021; Diversi and Moreira, 2012) yet it is a contested space in the eyes of even the enlightened members of the general public. The writing acts of the graffiti vandal, if they appear in the public eye to be random or spasmodic, are often to be found 'on the edge of what we know are the dark paths and thick undergrowth of what we don't know, of what we fear, of what we have banished and forgotten' (Shaw, 2016). However, the graffiti vandal is not always someone who is feared, detested or seen as reckless. Through their handling of artistic activism, the vandal can be turned into a graffiti artist and be seen by the public as part of an aesthetic performance, bringing with them new forms of artistic expression (Mcauliffe, 2012). Their work is created to affect the pedestrian public in the form of a native-voice-made-sign, ranging in its register from the sociopolitical (Palmer, 2017) to the apotropaic (Champion, 2015). Both writers, vandal and artist, use a contested tool aimed for social comment, a noteworthy *écriture* (Foucault, 1969) used consciously, subconsciously or unconsciously to defenestrate habituated behaviours by putting the margin at the centre, whatever that margin may be.

This paper aims to situate its relationship to graffiti within the notion of affect (Hasley and Young, 2006), with Gille Deleuze's (2005) concept of becomings-immanent, away from the sociological polemics of theoretical criminology and toward Michel Foucault's notion of the author's 'systems of valorisation' (Foucault, 1969, 2020) where the writer turns away from what Martin Buber (1975) terms the I-It utility and towards the world view of the global citizen through the I-Thou relationship. Similar to Khalil and Marciano (2020), this paper aims to stimulate the I-Thou mode of action by practising an aspect of transcendental utility which is 'the ecstasy of striving and entering into a fusion of some imagined successful self' (pp.153). Furthermore, whilst this paper aims to acknowledge the social constructs of meaning (Yandell, 2013) as well as the rhizomatic interconnections of a creative community (Palmer, 2017) — a community who embodies an alternative fund of knowledge to the mainstream culture (Gonzales et al, 2009) and, at the same time, offering an alternative form of 'storying' that culture as an auxiliary to their own (Hampton and Demartini, 2017) — the drive of this research assemblage has been to usurp the what and why of graffiti by foregrounding the imitational, formal, instrumental and emotional principles of the graffiti writer (Mcauliffe, 2012) which underpin the how of graffiti writing, as a way into a 'plane of immanence' (Hasley and Young, 2006). Similar to Buber's I-Thou field of dialogical decision making (Khalil and Marciano, 2020, pp.152-154), this paper aims to investigate the potential benefit of writing like a graffiti writer as a route into a 'pure structure' of writing as a form of listening within a subject-to-subject domain which, in itself, aims to 'reinscribes in transcendental terms the theological affirmation of its sacred origin' (Foucault, 1969, pp.303),

During the study in action, to support and stimulate such a transcendental utility, I consolidated the wide range of aesthetic principles associated with graffiti to help direct my writing practice. These were reduced to four main areas with the short statement: graffiti is Nameless, Modern, Rooted and Visual. These four areas provided me with the guidance,

enthusiasm and discipline of becoming part of the imagined community of a graffiti writer whilst remaining within the field of therapeutic creative writing, as espoused by Gillie Bolton (1999) in 'Every Poem Breaks A Silence That Had To Be Overcome'. This combination became the transcendental mantra behind a new, discomfiting mantle of expertise. In the same vein as Hasley and Young (2006), I position graffiti, and its discomfiting relationship<sup>3</sup> to a writer's identity, as a form of praxis to surpass the author-function as merely a plurality of egos (Foucault, 1969) whilst substituting it for an urban I-Thou model as a reflexive tool. Through the guidance as set out in Chang's (2009) 'Autoethnography as method' I will investigate whether the aesthetic principles of graffiti can be used as a therapeutic writing practice (Bolton, 1999, 2018) or mantle (Heathcote, 2009) to move the creative writer away from social constructs, cognitive dead-ends, or corrosive creative stimuli — such as fame and validation — and transcend their identity as a writer to a more profound relationship of subject-to-subject listening, based on Buber's (1975) concept of the I-Thou relationship and Foucault's (1961) notion of the author as a tool against the docile body (Foucault, 2020, pp133-169); first through painful listening to the other (Barenboim and Said, 2009) and then to the pleasures of rhizomatic writing (Palmer, 2017).

## 1.2 Why should poetry listen to graffiti?

It is true that poetry and graffiti share many overlapping creative intersections, such as: imagery, tonal rhythm and style. It may also be said that the cross pollination between the two practices is detectable in each other's body of work,

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<sup>3</sup> Graffiti therefore should not be divorced from the event of writing illicitly. And, more directly, it should not be equated to the cultivation or search for identity. Fame (attaining the status or identity of a king) is in many instances important, but, as explained later, *pleasure* (the intensity of feeling which, for instance, accompanies the motioning of the aerosol can) is equally significant. Indeed, our conversations with graffiti writers indicate that writing induces a series of singular moments where identity is put asunder through the performance of what Deleuze and Guattari have called *becomings-immanent* (denoting moments where a body—for whatever period—inhabits space and time in ways which resist subjective and objective attempts to classify, name or order events). (Hasley and Young, 2006, pp278)

sharing in both trope and form.<sup>4</sup> Further still, it is also significant that graffiti writers have recently begun to adopt the voice of the poet in their street art (Barbosa and Garrido, 2020; Mattanza, 2017). Yet, what actually unites these two practices as creative kin is that they face general adversity in the eye of the public (Lerner, 2016) and are often consumed as something detestable to public taste in that they are both perceived as marginal productions devoid of value (Barbosa and Garrido, 2020).

In contrast, a lot has been written by poets about the cousinship between music and poetry (Sampson, 2011, pp.1-27); and this makes clear sense if one traces the history of the lyric poet or even the etymology of the lyric itself. Indeed, many writers subscribe to the belief that there are inherent formal benefits to be found between music and poetry (Naylor, 1980; Donaghy, 2009; Wallace and Costello, 1990). And, if one were to dig a little deeper, the same could be said for poetry and the visual arts (Brillantes-Evangelista, 2013; Meyer, 2017). However, unlike the dichotomy between poetry and music, the benefits of practicing a visual art which is illicit and covert — practicing it by adopting it as a Heathcotian mantle — has gone somewhat uncharted.

The potential benefits of behaving and composing writing like a graffiti artist presents the poet with the opportunity to disentangle their identity from the socially-constructed expectations of being an valorised writer in a capitalist society. One benefit under investigation in this paper is the opportunity to recast a writer's identity as a voice that does not speak for or through but with the place in which they are able to locate themselves. Such sentiments are what Gillie Bolton (1999) refers to when writing for the internal critique and what Paulo Freire (1993) means when he says: 'to say a true word - which is praxis - is to transform the world' (p.88).

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<sup>4</sup> One may need only to recall Apollinaire's Calligramme posters hand-pasted down the side streets of Montmartre(fn), Blake's self-published illuminated manuscripts(fn), Harrison's vandalism in 'V' and his internalisation of his father's palimpsest headstone(fn), or Ginsberg's 'obscene manuscripts on the windows of the skull'(fn) to see that graffiti has made it into the mainstream of the poetic tradition.

Poets will find relief as writers by thinking in terms of voices, by appealing to their internal critique, rather than to the pressures of print and to return to 'the fact that the radical basis of poetry has always been speech, or rather song – in any case the chanted word, the heard word' (Dvorak, 2006, pp2). Or as Foucault (1969) writes in 'What is an author?': there was a time when those texts which we now call 'literary' (stories, folk tales, epics, and tragedies) were accepted, circulated, and valorised without any question about the identity of the author. Their anonymity was ignored because their real or supposed age was a sufficient guarantee of their authenticity.' (Foucault, 1969, pp.306)

By bridging these two fields of writer and audience and by problematising the polemic of voice and print, the term 'voiceprint'<sup>5</sup> goes a good distance in establishing the intersecting grounds of poetry and graffiti writing as a dialogical relationship between writer and place; as a Buberian I-Thou model for decision making; as a 'plane of immanence' (Deleuze, 2005) in which becomings-immanent can take place. It serves to help set out in more chartable terms the role of the poet as transcriber: a crafter in the act of profound listening, which will require what Barenboim (2004) explores through the concept of 'painful listening' (pp.3-28).

### 1.3 How can I listen?

As the sole participant of the study, both disciplines of writing will require me to move beyond my habituated writing

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<sup>5</sup> Before its 21st Century usage as a term referring to the solipsistic, voice-activated encryption password, 'voiceprint' was a term which was commonly found in the criticism of American poetry during the twentieth century and can also be found outside of the western hemisphere with Russian Formalism in the early 1900s (Wheeler, 2008). Today, voice in contemporary poetry is seen as 'a live thing that is born in the act of composing' which is then 'a discovered kind of 'coherence', that is, in effect, owned' (Ivory and Szirtes, 2012 pp.20). Perhaps because of this, however, voice in the modern literary landscape has become popularised and monetised via a combination of contemporary cultural values and the poetry publishing industry as a whole. One need only point to Faber and Faber's Academy, Poet In Residence grants, SLAM Poetry prizes, National Awards, or even the experiences of the Poet Laureate, as examples of how poetry is being valued by a consumerist capitalism; or how the margins are being mined for their marketability as publishing houses 'adapt or die' in a market whose main marketing prerogative is to discover the 'new' voice *of and for* the next generation.



practices as a poet and move toward a discomfoting, interim modality. Adopting Dorothy Heathcote's (2009) principles behind her 'Mantle of the Expert' approach, this study explores what it is for writers to move outside of their own modalities and to adopt new and discomfoting mantles; to unmask and remake their own muses, enthused by their own understanding of what makes good writing and what they deem writing to be good for:

Mantle is not a cloak by which a person is recognised. This is no garment to cover. I use it as a quality: of leadership, carrying standards of behaviour, morality, responsibility, ethics and the spiritual basis of all action. (Heathcote, 2009, pp1-2)

## 2.0 Outline of the study

### 2.1 Overview of the study in practice

The study in practice hinges on the research question — Can the aesthetic principles of graffiti have a potential benefit for the practicing poet? — and combines three key exercises which were planned to be performed daily over the course of four weeks during January 2022, including: i) adopting the 'mantle' of the graffiti writer ii) inventorying and walking locally iii) freewriting and journalling.

As the single participant of the study, whilst conducting the daily exercises, I undertook a weekly process of the action research cycle 'look, think, act', facilitated by my freewriting exercises (Bolton, 1999, 2003, 2010, 2011), as well as using my inventorying as an autoethnographic strategy (Chang, 2009) and journalling as a primary data source. These were underpinned by the principles of Chang's (2009) 'Autoethnography as method'. The combination of all three formed the basis of the current research assemblage.

Over the four week period, I kept up my daily writing practices as a poet, my day-to-day position as a classroom Teacher of English, whilst adopting the 'mantle' of aesthetic principles related to a graffiti writer in order to help transcend

the hidden discourses behind my position as a writer. These principles were contained within the mantra 'graffiti is Nameless, Visual, Modern and Rooted'. As the single participant, a schedule of one morning walk, one evening walk, a free writing exercise and any additional journaling was established and adhered to. The intentionality behind the project was to collect data and research as a contribution to the field of a pedagogy of discomfort. A decision to stick to a predetermined route for the daily walks helped to form part of a strategy to limit unnecessary interventions and to help mitigate endless amounts of self-centric data (Chang, 2009, pp.77) as well as any unforeseen biases surrounding the research (Bearne, 2003). Ethically, as part of a univocal autoethnography, one area I had to be particularly sensitive to was the personal and professional opinion that the hegemonic environment of a capitalist society is a negative horizon for the practicing poet. Such internalised discourses were worked through during the course of the research and were a defining motive for adopting a research assemblage as a strategy, so that I could still utilise and interrogate the current 'dominant theoretical stances and hegemonic paradigms' (Lapadat, 2017, pp589).

### 3.0 Setting and participants

The setting for the action research portion (Bearne, 2003) of this research assemblage has taken place in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. I have selected myself to be the only participant in the study in order to utilise the specific topics in my life (namely, that I am a publishing poet and, as a school teacher, also a figure of authority within my local community) to reach the broad topic of the research question with control over the confirmation bias and the invasion of any unnecessary intervention that might pose a potential risk to new insights into 'cultural understanding underlying autobiographical experiences' (Chang, 2009, pp.49).

As the only participant in the study, I conducted a twenty minute walk twice a day for a total of four weeks as part of a

method of controlling and gathering images and ideas through 'a combination of directed sampling and accidental encounters' (Palmer, 2017, pp.3657). The choice in locality of setting was employed to utilise the autobiographical data needed to engage my freewriting, journalling and autoethnographic approaches for data analysis and to interpret cultural assumptions (Chang, 2009, pp.9). The walk can be traced from Hammersmith Bridge, following the riverside Lower Mall pathway, out through Furnival Gardens, to the connecting underpass which passes under the Great West Road (A4). Significantly, I would like to underline the important position of the walking pedestrian as forming a view of the world which demarcates another threshold between poet and graffiti writer. For both writers, the walking pedestrian forms a domain which interconnects the imaginative spaces of creativity, the public space where work is published, the 'real world' of the society which contains it and which provides the raw material for the writer (Williams, 2013, pp.236).

Walks were conducted at dawn and at dusk. The choice to conduct two walks a day was to add duality to my freewriting; however, primarily, it was decided as a course of action to acknowledge that if 'there is a walking-for-thinking that is separate from other types of walking' (Keinanen, 2015, pp.603) then a large part of this study should be to apply the conditions and standards of a graffiti writer who most often will operate under the conditions of nightfall. The phrase 'moving gestalt' (Keinanen, 2015, pp.601) helps to summarise the different rhythms and speeds of walking - including the visual stimulation from the environment - which are most conducive to each writer's thinking and, therefore, each writer's writing. As I walked and noticed the atmosphere of the landscape, as well as the interaction of the surroundings through walking, I identified the previous sites of graffiti as points of praxis, sites where becomings-immanent (Hasley and Young, 2006) took place and as crucial stopping places (Muldoon, 2006, pp.53-81) for both modalities of writing. As a setting for a pedagogy of discomfort, I acknowledged that

applying the ‘mantle’ of the graffiti writer merely at the writing desk alone would only be an appropriation of aesthetic principles, or even simply a stylistic strategy, and might render the project as redundant. If I was to understand and collect data surrounding the potential benefits of adopting a discomforting aesthetic principle, then it was imperative that I establish and nurture the new schema of the graffiti writer as a part of ‘insider research’ rather than indigenous behaviour (Butz, 2009, pp.1669-1670). This, in turn, led to an act of opportunistic research within the study and helped to shed light on the identification axis of the writer under investigation.

#### 4.0 Methodology

##### 4.1 Research Assemblage:

###### Action Research

The decision to use a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework was that it provided both the internal scaffolding and the outer layer required to help me navigate a line of objectivity through the autoethnographic field of research. The risk of becoming a narrative-based research project would be clear to anybody who uses themselves as the singular participant in the research (Butz, 2009; Chang, 2009; Cook, 2014). As I have used the PAR framework before and was familiar with its research cycle, I knew that it would accommodate the multi-method approach of a research assemblage and would ‘enable you to explore specific aspects of further depth, or offers opportunities for you to see data from one source confirm or disconfirm findings from data from another source’ (Bearne, Graham & Marsh, 2007).

###### Autoethnography

At the centre of this research assemblage is the need for a deeper cultural understanding based on biographical detail. I have acknowledged my position as what Chang (2009) describes as an “edgewalker” (pp.28) and intended to mine such a position of selfhood being one which is confident in its cross-cultural status in order to investigate the identification

axis of being a poet. Daily journaling focused on an autoethnographic orientation and included such methods as auto-observation, confessional tales, ethnographic poetics, first-person accounts, lived experience, opportunistic research, personal narratives, radical empiricism and reflexive ethnography (Chang, 2009). Focusing on empathetic understanding, as theologically expounded by Martin Buber (1971) in 'I And Thou' and practiced by Daniel Barenboim through his concept of painful listening during the East/West Divan Project, I applied autoethnographic methods to promote the conditions for the I-Thou encounter 'where those engaged in dialogue can experience each other's whole being' (Chang, 2009, pp27). It was paramount that my selection of methods reinforced the belief that writers embody not only a polyglossial language (Bakhtin, 2017, pp.4-40) but also a landscape for painful listening in which the many selves of a community are speaking, whilst maintaining 'a mode of reflexivity for tracing the effects of these influences' (Butz, 2009, pp1661).

### Freewriting

Freewriting as a reflective form of writing and as a therapeutic writing practice was employed at every stage of the research assemblage. I used the practices as outlined by Gillie Bolton in 'Write Yourself' (2010) as well as 'Reflective practice: writing and professional development' (2011). I was aware in the planning of the study in action that a non-judgemental, freely associative site for writing would be crucial in the successful participation of the study. Therefore, by design, each piece of freewriting was based on but not limited to the premise that 'participants are asked to write freely, with no planning or forethought, on a fairly open theme' (Bolton, 1999, pp241). Themes were selected by either identifying specific topics from my journaling or by broadening patterns between journal entries to a particular area of research or subject area. In addition to my freewriting, I have also utilised a version of automatism as an efficacious strategy in supporting free recall (Wammes, 2016) for the moments in the research in action which presented themselves as non-verbal, or pre-optimally

imagist, yet could perform as stimuli for concepts, ideas and dialogues which went across the experimental thresholds of discursive research.

#### 4.2 Praxis

As mentioned previously, as a method of autoethnographic research, the circumstances for opportunist research presented itself during the course of the study. Although the graffiti writing I undertook might not be seen as conventional graffiti - i.e., the tools and methods of application were designed to be impermanent rather than permanent, working with the landscape and not radically against it - I grew to believe that in order to understand the Deleuzian notion of becomings-immanent I was required to establish a 'plane of immanence' for creativity. This aspect of the study in action pointed towards another threshold: that of the insider/indigenous binary divide.

#### 5.0 Throwing One's Voice: An overview of the study in action

The study in action took place over the course of four weeks, following a schedule of walks-at-dawn and night-guided-walks along the Thames pathway. The walks were recurrent along the same path from Hammersmith Bridge, on the northern aspect of Lower Mall, past Dove Pier, to Funnival Gardens underpass. A routine of daily journaling coincided with my walks along the riverside, as well as an itinerary of freewriting events which were planned to take place at the writer's desk and en plein air, so as to invoke both the aesthetic and the instinct of a graffiti writer. Between the starting and end points of the pedestrian route, stopping places were designated by pre-existing graffiti writing, inclusive of: thrown murals, tags, stencils and stickers (see Appendix I). Walks were used as a voiceprint for writing, as an active site for becomings-immanent and authorial listening, and as a stimuli for the I-Thou decision making model. Journaling was used as a space in which the Participant Action Research (PAR) and autoethnographic elements of the research assemblage could be synthesised. Reviews and revision of the week's journals

were undertaken at the end of each week, as part of the PAR framework, in order to support objectivity and sustain my intention for the forthcoming cycle. Freewriting exercises varied and remained open in order to enable associative links to future writing and to support free recall under the new aesthetic principles of my writing which adopted the mantle of 'graffiti is Nameless, Modern, Rooted and Visual'. The outcome of the study was driven by its research question and not by the intention to produce a poem or that which would be considered reputable in the eyes of other poets. In short, the study was not designed to establish the blueprint of a creative writing workshop, rather to harness the intrinsic nature of attending to oneself during the process of reflective writing and profound listening.

## 6.0 Data Analysis

Following the methodological guidance as set out in 'Autoethnography as method' (Chang, 2009, pp.59 - pp.112), internal data sources such as self-observational and self-reflective data - yielded from chronicling, inventorying and visualising self as strategies for capturing personal data - has been paired with external data sources, such as textual and non-textual artefacts, in order to validate and triangulate the self-reflective data of the study. The inventory approach (Chang, 2009) to autoethnographic research enabled me not only to collect but also to evaluate and organise the mass amounts of self-centric data I was producing. I adopted Chang's 'five thematic categories' (2009, pp.77) which has been modified and expanded to meet the research needs for the current study in action, as follows: stopping places, virtues and values, rituals, mentors, and cultural artefacts.

### 6.1 Graffiti Writer: stopping places, virtues and values, rituals, mentors and cultural artefacts

Over the course of the four week study in action I recorded the graffiti writing which appealed to me on each day. By using the graffiti writing as a cultural artefact, I instigated a reflective process where I recognised the absent figure of the writing as a writer who had performed the mark making as an act of

becomings-immanent and reflected within and with the space of the I-Thou model of what the writer was in the act of transcribing. Over the course of the walking schedule, I applied a matrix to help categorise the different types of graffiti writing I encountered, as detailed by the chart below (Figure 1) and intended to harness the experience as a reflective practice for the itinerary of writing exercises, scheduled for later that week.

A primary observation that can be made about my relationship with the graffiti writing from Hammersmith Bridge to Farnival Gardens underpass is a simple yet valuable one: the more I looked, the more I noticed; the more I noticed, the more I attended. Throughout the weeks there is an increase in the categorical variety of graffiti that I observed as well as an increase in the proportionate amount. A clear inference can be made here regarding my growing aesthetic appreciation for the character, expression and daring of each type of graffiti, its 'profit and delight' (Collingwood, 1937, pp.82), but also for a subconscious attachment to the 'latent social ethos of this group of people' (Chang, 2009, pp.77). Furthermore, a secondary observation can be made about the predominant type of graffiti: that being, not only the what but also the how or mode of graffiti writing which had taken place along the site.

Tags - short, sharp nom-de-plumes - are conventionally used to delineate territorial sites between graffiti writers. They are juvenile and edgy in character, expression and virtue. As standard, they are carried out at the pedestrian level and do not require much planning, acts of daring (such as trespassing or climbing) or artistic control. Tags are widely regarded by the general public as the vandal's trademark. As a flag of intention (Badiou, 2019) their symbolic consistency is a clear act of controlled aggression.

Tag graffiti, whether in permanent marker or thrown in spray paint, made up the majority of graffiti sites. Appearing flagrantly along the Thames pathway, they composed a script,



transcription or simulacra to which I could listen. Even at sites where they had been painted over and erased (see Item 4 and Item 5) their presence became ever more detectable and aesthetically pleasing; as though they were a negative landscape, a palimpsestic record of the margin (Foucault, 2020) and a *via negativa* of the current social, political and cultural mainstream (see Item 6).

Following the weekly cycles of the PAR framework, evaluative statements were made based on each week's yield of data and framed via daytime and nighttime journaling and notes surrounding the topic of the establishment in poetry as a public display (see Appendix 3). The act of journaling took the place of Chang's (2009) mentors 'from whom you have learned new knowledge, skills, principles, wisdom, or perspectives that have made an impact' (pp.79). Therefore, despite efforts to remain objective as the single participant in the study, it is highly probable that the act of journaling underpinned unconscious biases which tended to dominate freewriting exercises inasmuch as, culturally speaking, we apply different cultural schemas of behaviour when walking the streets at day or at night. In short, the more graffiti I observed, the more comfortable I found myself operating under the conditions of the graffiti writer. This habituated behaviour began to have a direct impact on my freewriting through the increase in frequency of automatic doodling, drawing and graphic designs (see Appendix 3). However, participation in such freewriting and ritualised practices did help to locate and gain 'community knowledge' (Chang, 2009, pp.78) which shared a pattern of reflective inquiry best summarised in the question: is the writer an authentically marginalised member of society or are they rather just problematised at its centre? This led to a cross analysis of the poems which are commissioned for public display via the 'Poetry On The Underground' programme (see Figure 2). This I utilised as an example of mainstream poetry to produce a taxonomy for an orthodox 'house style' of poesis, in which I could respond.

Deconstruction of the stylistic and linguistic strategies of the poems featured in the 'Poems on the underground' (see Appendix 6) programme for November to December revealed a number of aesthetic considerations for the study in action. If I was to authentically adopt the mantle of the graffiti writer, my writing would need to go beyond the aesthetic mantra: graffiti writing is Nameless, Modern, Rooted and Visual. Through quantifying the underpinning poetic features of the 'Poems on the underground' poems, I was able to chart the following patterns: imagery is predominantly visual imagery; iambic pentameter is the favoured metre; enjambment is a standard of the poems; and that there is a high reliance on metaphor to form poetic expression. Therefore, if I was going to operate under the aesthetic principles of the graffiti writer, then I must respond to these orthodox or mainstream poetic features in order to defenestrate them; conform to convention in order to subvert its convenience; or, at best, write from the margins of this centralised poetic practice in order to destabilise it. The difference between these two styles of poetry can be seen as the differences between two intersecting cultural artefacts.

During these weeks, my journalling revealed a preoccupation with the roots of graffiti art, from a basis of a localised application in medieval culture (Appendix 3). Questions were raised around notions of what constitutes an acceptable, permissible, useful or social act of mark making in public (see Item 8). Such explorations in my journalling led to an investigation of public signs, community versus social endorsement, and orthodox radicalism versus radical orthodoxy. It is, therefore, understandable that the undercurrents of such thinking likewise found expression through my creative writing (Appendix 4). It also stimulated the creation of an *ars poetica* manifesto to help supplement the mantra of the aforementioned Heathcotian mantle. This was entitled 'Hi-Vis Poetics' (Appendix 5).

In summary, reviewing the analysis of the internal and external data sources revealed a shift in aesthetic priorities. Where I

was once a practicing poet who valued their technical ability and formal control as the mark of an authentic poet, now I was leaning towards a style of free-recall through an ethos of *via negativa*. Similarly to my preoccupation with the graffiti tag as a stylistic and cultural expression, I began to adopt an edgy style to my writing, replete with juvenilia throughout my themes whilst commanding an air of menace or digressional potential. A style I found, like the landscapes it laboured with, I was able to listen to profoundly, again and again, without the thirst for professional validation but through the invitation of the other.

### 8.0 Evaluation

The shortcomings of this research project were inherent within its design. Although the limitation of a single participant for the study in action provided the dependable foundations of a univocal autoethnography, as well as an investigation into the identity of the author, it also restricted the scope of the research assemblage. Despite applying a Participatory Action Research (PAR) cycle and evaluative framework to help support my objectivity in the research, the very nature of autoethnography is a form of research which creates boundless amounts of self-centric data. The sheer volume of 'useful' data produced and the validity of its intrinsic, unbiased nature is questionable. One outcome I have reached from undertaking the research in its current design is that the form and structure of the research assemblage must be reviewed and altered in order to secure future findings. A managerial model where the author of the research is positioned outside of the study in action in order to oversee and coordinate a sample of 'edgewalkers' (Chang, 2009) who are conducting their own autoethnographies is most suitable. Such a model would involve a sample of participants who operate as graffiti writers applying the aesthetic principles of poetry and also a sample of poets who do the reverse. However, I believe that the current research assemblage has been profoundly fruitful as a form of therapeutic writing. My findings moved me beyond the data yielded and beyond the pages of my meticulous inventorying and brave journaling. Through

adopting the aesthetic mantle of a graffiti writer, through adopting a Heathcotian mantle and applying the transcendental utility of Buber's I-Thou model, I was able to reach what Gillie Bolton calls the intrinsic critique. What remains after the process of the study in action is the *via negativa* which graffiti artists and graffiti vandals honour through their work. As embodied in the rhizomatic style of graffiti, in the *écriture* of tag graffiti writing, I have found a new form of subject-to-subject listening, not to the work produced or the work alone but to the creative community speaking through the landscape with their nameless acts of becoming-immanent. Such a discovery puts the writer beyond the 'objects of appropriation' and the discourses 'regulated by the culture in which it circulates' and places the poet back within its 'primordial status' (Foucault, 1969, pp.299-305).

## 9.0 Conclusion

'When I confront a human being as my Thou and speak the basic word I-Thou to him, then he is no thing among things nor does he consist of things' (Buber, 1975, pp.14). In today's post-COVID19 society, we find ourselves on a new threshold where the act of deep listening to the other will help to put the margin at the centre and puts an authentically democratic utility at the heart of our culture. It is important to note that identifying as a graffiti writer was not the aim of the study in action. Instead, a combination of the Heathcotian mantle, Buber's I-Thou framework for decision making and Foucault's position of destabilising the 'systems of valorisation' (Foucault, 1969) in the author, were equally vital modes of inquiry which all benefited from a prototypically radical image, such as the graffiti writer. This new mantle helped to position myself and my writing practices in a discomfiting way in order to break with the norms of commercial dominion overshadowing personal discovery. What remains outside the scope of this study is also there at its centre, the hope that a contribution to a pedagogy of emancipation will 'unfold like a game that inevitably moves beyond its own rules and finally leaves them behind' (Foucault, 1969, pp.300).

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# **GOOGLE STREET VIEW MEETS WANDERING ROCKS: SEB DUNCAN**

*How can virtual wandering inspire writing about place?*

## Introduction and Aims

Wandering Rocks - sometimes known as 'Ulysses in miniature' - was the result of James Joyce's walks and social interactions in 1900s Dublin. Joyce wrote about the daily lives of the people of that city, using physical street maps as a kind of ethnographic GPS. He started Ulysses in 1914 and wrote the chapter after moving to Zurich when war broke out in Europe. This last detail is interesting because he wrote - or at least re-drafted - Wandering Rocks after he had left the city it had inspired. But what if Joyce had had access to Google Street View? Would this have aided his writing process or hindered it? This document attempts to analyse my own writing process, which as a mode of practice, involves a large amount of research, data gathering and inspiration of place in the way Joyce did. For me, the use of maps and more specifically Google Street View, became an essential part my writing between 2019-2020. This was not least because I was having to work in lockdown during the COVID 19 pandemic.

By the time I had already started the first draft of my novel, I was faced with how to write within the restricted terms of a lockdown, without travel or any social interaction. The limits of the pandemic resulted in my ethnographic observations being centred around historical research (The Memoirs of a Prague Executioner by Josef Svátek) and online sources such as blogs, fan websites, articles and of course Google Street View. I had already conceptualised the idea for the book and was at the research/first draft stage so the timing suited me. This document is a metacognitive exercise that will help me to better reflect upon how and why I write and hopefully be of interest to other creative writing students of fiction who understand writing as being ultimately visual in nature.

“I feel I am missing something if I read a novel that is mostly about dialogue and ideas and emotions. I need to be able to see the furniture, I need to be able to know what’s out that window. If I don’t have that when I’m reading and writing, everything seems to sort of drift without any anchor whatsoever. It doesn’t quite seem real”. (Mark Haddon, Goldmark Gallery via YouTube 2021).

My research addresses key questions:

What does the use of Google Street View and other digital media do to the experience of writing and how does it aid the writing process?

Can writers who are not able to engage with the outside world benefit from using Street View and other digital media?

What are the disadvantages of using Street View compared to the experience of ‘real walks’ in the outside world?

Can writers ‘surprise themselves’ by using Street View and other digital media?

By way of context, the book I am basing this research on is my novella *Headcase: A Post-truth ghost story* (Amazon KDP, 2021), a thriller centred around a murder investigation in 21st Century Prague set against the backdrop of the legend of a medieval Czech executioner. My trip to the city in 2013 inspired the idea for the story, and part of this document’s purpose is to reflect upon that physical visit and my subsequent virtual visits and to compare the different writing that those two ethnographies produced.

The (un)conscious Map and Wandering Rocks

When using Street View as a writing tool, ‘it’ (the map) is not conscious of the writer’s desire to involve itself within a story.

The writer’s plot, ideas, narrative intentions are within the mind of the writer but not revealed to the passivity of Street View so the interaction is one way (unlike James Joyce in *Wanderings Rocks*). However, the virtual street is alive with possibilities in the same way a real street is. Moreover, it is a frozen moment and a living space. The images and events in

the street can be employed within the plot, to spark new ideas for fresh parts of the narrative, even influence the direction of the story. Is this not a form of interpolation, whereby events that are happening in one space (the map) are overlapping with events in another (the writer's mind)? Indeed, one could argue that the street furniture within a virtual walk interpolates with different stories unseen in the rest of the virtual city that at some point in time will have (or have had) an influence on each other. The use of Street View in this way reminds me of the advice given about planning in David Morley's Introduction to Creative Writing, that too much can stifle the writing process:

"If there is no surprise for you, the writer, then there is a possibility there will be little surprise for the reader either, for your fiction might feel predicted and thus predictable. If you tie everything neatly, what is the writer's or reader's role?" (David Morley, 2007).

What better way to 'surprise yourself' than to go strolling around streets in remembered cities, where events are unfolding (or have unfolded) that 'bump into' the elements of an existing story in the mind of the writer.

In the similar way a virtual map contains a network of surprising events, in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), Deleuze and Guattari use the image of rhizomes as a metaphor for creativity that spread by underground networks, linking one 'node' to another. They see all this as a powerful image of genuinely creative thinking: resourceful, flexible and unexpected ('springing suddenly from anywhere, everywhere'), and developing by subtle transverse networks in unseen, subterranean ways (Rob Pope, 2005). On creative writing and new media in relation to 'emergence', Hazel Smith puts it like this:

"When we talk about emergence as authors, we mean our feeling that a piece of our writing is evolving in a way that we would never have anticipated. However, this sensation

becomes much stronger when authors partially hand over the task of writing to the computer, because one computational event will continuously trigger another..." (Hazel Smith, 2012).

However, I think it is also important to add that using Street View in this way should not be misunderstood as a replacement for the writer's imagination. In his laconic way, Will Self illustrates this point by using the image of a Morris Traveller, where you can simply search for the image of the vehicle on the web and when you write, you describe the image of the car you see on the screen and you're not thinking in words, which is what literature essentially is, just as painting a picture is thinking in paint. (Will Self, *How To Academy* via YouTube, 2021). For this very reason, Self has since dispensed with the computer all together, preferring instead to write on an old-fashioned typewriter. I agree with his views on literature and the perils of instant access to images, but I think some latitude should also be given to the writer who wishes to place his own imagined characters and images in the context of a virtual street. Street View can be useful to enhance the writing process of a scene that has already been conceived in the mind of the writer and should be thought of as a useful writing tool, in the same way the technique of ekphrasis has been used to stimulate writers for centuries, whereby one artifact (a Street View image) can help to create another artifact (a written narrative).

#### Life Writing, voyeurism and my writing

I am aware that some may balk at the idea of the solitary writer stumbling around their virtual map, without the actual human interaction that Joyce had in his urban meanderings. The obviously intimate knowledge Joyce had of the characters he wrote about have an authentic and ultimately modernist flavour to them. Whether describing the inner musings of Father Conmee as he ambles through the streets:

"Father Conmee was wonderfully well indeed. He would go to Buxton probably for the waters".

Or highlighting social injustice through observations filled with pathos:

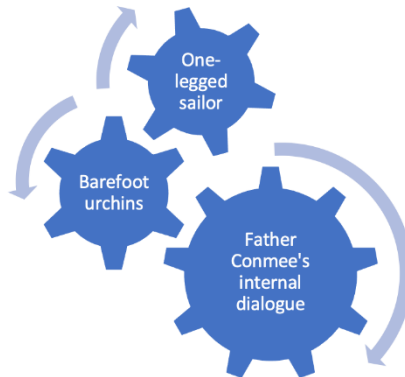
“A stout lady stopped, took a copper coin from her purse and dropped it into the cap held out to her. The sailor grumbled thanks, glanced sourly at the unheeding windows, sank his head and swung himself forward four strides. He halted and growled angrily.

For England!

Two barefoot urchins, sucking long liquorice laces, halted near him, gaping at his stump with their yellowslobbered mouths.

Home and Beauty”. (James Joyce, 1920)

Diagram 1. These observations of events overlap with Father Conmee’s internal dialogue in a non-linear way, interlocking with other parts of the narrative.



Throughout *Ulysses*' massive narrative arc, Joyce's prose requires the reader to pay attention at all times. It seems Joyce is making us hang on for dear life as this choppy journey unfolds; everyone is in a parlous state, including the reader.

But there is also something voyeuristic about a lot of his observations in *Wandering Rocks*. Although having intimate knowledge of the characters in the book, Joyce seems to be distanced from them. His aim is to present real life unadorned by his own opinions, in the same way a documentary film maker captures hours of footage to be then edited down to a digestible form. In this way, writing ends up being an act of solitude, and because of this, characters can be drawn from the writer's imaginings just as much from real experience. Indeed, it is commonly accepted that all writers are really writing themselves whether consciously or otherwise, when the person and the writer are invisible to each other or they might move between selves, characters of themselves, while they are writing. (Margaret Atwood, 2002). If this is the case, what difference does it make if a writer seeks to tell stories from their own imagination (that result in accidentally reflecting people in their own worlds) or if they consciously write about their own lives (whilst inadvertently creating new characters). Most writers wish to tap directly into their own lived experiences as a starting point and this is surely the best way to express feelings and emotions in an authentic way, and examples of this type of work are part of the popular canon. Indeed, it is important for us to acknowledge the funds of knowledge (Schechter, 2006) that are available for unheard voices to be heard.

But my writing process does not start in this way. As well as using places as inspiration, I read a lot of non-fiction and news media that fuels the ideas for my stories. For example, *Headcase* started off as a gothic horror story that takes place in the 21st Century but soon mutated into a satire. My idea about it was this: if a well-known myth already existed about a 17th Century executioner, why not deliberately conflate that story with the horrifying beliefs/myths now being disseminated by social media. For example, there are a growing number of people who believe the earth is still flat, and these ideas were being challenged for the first time in the 17th Century when the original story of Jan Mydlár (the



executioner) was being played out. This, and other aspects of social media/post-truth phenomena, offered an opportunity to satirise our modern world within the context of a famous medieval myth. My aim was to entertain my reader whilst at the same time hold a mirror up to society, bluntly and viciously. I wanted my readers to lose themselves in a strange world that was worryingly right outside their door. This excerpt describes 'the ghost' of Jan Mydlár as he walks around the streets of Prague, unaware that he is in fact in the 21st Century:

“Everyone seemed to be muttering to themselves as they walked in the street, particularly those who wore a strange form of white jewellery connected to their ears. Passing a trader of books, he noticed a large sign saying “Flat Earth. Flat Out Truth”. Jan had had many heated arguments in the tavern with these uneducated imbeciles who believed the world to be flat. How they could still be talking of such nonsense now in the 17th Century was beyond him”. (Headcase, 2021)

For me, writing is an exercise in problem solving. A project. The literary form of an earworm; when a plot or character idea strikes, there is no shifting it. Between 2016-2018 I became highly concerned about the distortion of truth being churned out by social media companies. It seemed Facebook and others were being used to spread division and hate, and I was amazed that most people around me were not that concerned about this (particularly my young adult students). Headcase became a vehicle to express this concern; a commercial vehicle that would be entertaining as well as informative. The pleasure in placing an idea or character in an unfamiliar situation and creating a satisfying, believable plot that the reader can get lost in, was the goal.

In Headcase there are echoes of Kafka's Joseph K in the form of Tomas Novák, our loyal civil servant battling crime as well as the mind-numbing absurdities of public relations management and bureaucracy:

“Novák was going to be pulled in every direction by various Prague ‘stakeholders’. Everyone had their own agenda, from the Ministry of Tourism through to the media outlets with their political affiliations”. (Headcase, 2021)

In the following scene, as well as the deliberate reference to *Metamorphosis*, my recollections of the Prague streets - combined with Street View wandering - had a direct influence on the way it was written:

“Novák walked up and out of his apartment into the chilly air for a break. The streets were silent except for the sound of a local bar owner pulling down the shutters for the night. As he stretched his back and looked up, Novák noticed an ironing board propped against the window of a brightly lit upper window, the folded legs poking up above the end of the board like antennas on a head, giving the silhouette a distinctly insect-like quality. It seemed to be staring directly down at him”. (Headcase, 2021)

#### Literature Review

As well as referencing *Wandering Rocks* as a broad theme, I have investigated how to deal with images and research (Research Methods in Education) and educational research more broadly (Educational Research; Contemporary Issues and Practical Approaches), creative writing research (The Cambridge Introduction to Creative Writing, The Cambridge Companion to Creative Writing), creative theory (Creativity, Theory, History, Practice), work that investigates the intersections between inspiration, writing style, and writing about place (Exercises in Style) as well as interviews with writers who present their views on writing and research (Mark Haddon, Margaret Atwood, Will Self). Lastly, for me the novel *Look Who’s Back*, by Timur Vermes, is a great example of how to incorporate a historical character into a modern satire and was a huge influence on *Headcase*. In addition, the novel *The Fear Index* by Robert Harris gave me the idea of combining technology with a ghost story.

### Methods and Methodology

The document will include a mixed research methodology. I will be using qualitative data analysis and because I will be dealing with images, content analysis will be used to organise and evaluate them whereby “We can analyse visual images in a similar way to that of analysing texts, for example, through ‘reading’ the meanings, through disclosing our own views, perspectives, backgrounds and values (reflexivity).” (Cohen et al., 2018). The research will be divided into the following stages: Immersion, Reflecting, Taking apart, Recombining, Relating and Locating Data. (J.J Wellington, 2000).

Because the research poses a few questions within the theme of narrative writing, I will also be organizing, analysing and presenting data by case studies.

“This is a flexible way to present this data so a series of individual case studies can be followed by an analysis that draws together common findings from the different case studies and also indicates the exclusive features of each”. (Cohen et al., 2018).

Commentary will be used to add context to the group of images related to a specific narrative text, whereby:

“Writing up a discourse analysis can be done through the construction of a narrative. Further, one can consider the purpose of the image in terms of its effects on the audience - intended audience or unintended audience, intended effects or unintended effects”. (Cohen et al., 2018).

Because analysing visual data is not straightforward, as images (moving or still) concern meaning making and interpretation (Cohen et al., 2018), this research has a tight focus that specifically investigates how these data can be pressed into service to aid an existing narrative. The data will be tabulated, clearly highlighting the image or Street View map, the narrative text and commentary.

## MY FINDINGS

### Image I - Bretislavova Street

#### Narrative text

On his phone, Novák checked the details of the physical address linked to the IP. The name of the auction company was Dorota Auctions. Walking up Bretislavova Street, the heavens started to open. Pulling the collar of his raincoat up around his neck, he followed the curving cobbled road to somewhere called Sims Burger Bistro. The auction address was behind here according to Google maps.

#### Commentary on Image I

Jan Mydlár's story (featured in the 17th Century prologue of *Headcase*) took place in a small town called Chrudim and I needed to research what kind of town it was now. Searching on Street View showed some interesting alleys in which to place a chase scene in the modern part of the story that I was about to write. The street was selected because of its route to the barn-like structure where the next scene would take place. The winding nature of the road would also help create blind spots to make the chase more exciting and the cobbles in the street added to the atmosphere that I wanted to portray. The street also seemed to be on a gentle slope which gave me the idea of distinguishing the different perspectives of the two characters clearly (one looking up, one looking down).

Using Street View here has enhanced the writing process in two ways: Firstly, it helped me to visualize as I wrote; to 'situate' my characters in a tangible context. Secondly, because of the sloping road it prompted me to write the scene in a more interesting way (sometimes the pursuer is hidden, sometimes he is exposed).

Image 2 - The Museum of Puppets

Narrative text

As he passed the window display of the Museum of Puppets, he reached a clothing shop called Milano Moda and noticed something out of the corner of his eye. Someone was following him. He stopped, turned a full 180 degrees and looked back down the curvy lane.

Image 3 – The Puppet

Narrative text

... Instinctively, Darius moved his head to the right and found himself looking into the dead eyes of a puppet in the window of some folk museum. Standing still, he slowly curved his head left to see if he had been spotted. Novák had moved on up the road.

Commentary on Images 2 and 3

Through my ethnographic research during my visit to Prague in 2013, I was made aware of puppetry as an important part of Czech cultural history (Don Giovanni being the most famous play, which I went to see). But the Street View discovery of The Museum of Puppets in 2020, adjacent to Bretislavova Street, gave me the idea to incorporate it in this scene as I wrote. Puppets introduced a macabre element here that I would not have thought of without this surprise discovery. They also became an important plot element later in the book.

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Image 4 – Arial view of the Chrudim barn

Narrative text

As Novák ascended the side of the barn, the rain was making clanging musical notes of varying pitches on the metal staircase. By now the light was getting bad and he pulled out his Maglite. The door was locked from the outside with a padlock, but it didn't take him long to smash it off with the butt of his heavy-duty torch. Removing his shoes, carefully placing them upright by the door and donning surgical gloves he entered.

As he pointed his torch straight into the room, he was immediately confronted by a grinning face at waist height. Moving carefully closer, it appeared to be a life-size puppet head, similar to those used in Czech puppet theatres all over the country. The light switch was not working so he cast his torch around the rest of the room. The long space was a small office of sorts with a long desk on one side of the narrow 8-metre-wide barn. The ceiling was low and felt oppressive, with a sagging roof and mould on the thin and wrinkled carpeting. The smell of the room was like a cross between wet crisps and mildew.

The space was completely empty except for a wireless router, its shape in the low light like a giant insect head with two vertical horns either side of it and two beady red lights for eyes. Pulling away the desk from the wall he heard something drop to the floor with a dull thump. Placing his torch on the floor he reached at the back of the desk and pulled out a small novel sized book. The insect router and the shadow of the puppet head across the wall made the place look like the backdrop to some nightmarish Czech pantomime.

#### Commentary on Image 4

The Street View images of Bretislavova Street in Chrudim revealed a long barn-like structure. I remembered spending a lot of time thinking about this space. I was at the point where I wanted the 17th Century story to intersect with the 21st Century one but wasn't sure how. The Street View discovery of the barn offered the place in which to do this. This find was a catalyst to write some eerie prose and introduce the

biographical novel (*Diary of a Prague Executioner*) as a McGuffin into the story. It was an example of me 'surprising myself' with a virtual location that helped take the plot into an interesting place.

In a later chapter, the barn is used again for the setting of one of the most visual scenes in the book:

#### Narrative text

As the officer moved slowly forward, her boot collided with a lump on the floor. She cast her torch below, to expose a rough brown sack about 6-foot long. Novák held his hand up for her to wait, and the officer picked out a crowbar from the sports bag and handed it to Novák. Gently poking down, the crowbar met resistance. Carefully pulling back a fold of sacking, revealed a blackness of almost artificial depth. It seemed to shimmer as their torchlights bounced unevenly across the surfaces of the object. The smell became worse as a large dead eye stared up at them. As the layers of cloth were unpeeled, several large black birds came into view. There must have been five of them in the bag. Maggots busily went about their wriggling, maggoty business as the stench rose to a crescendo. Novák poked down lightly into the mass of feathers. A deadened metallic sound rang out. He tapped again and flipped back one of the wings to show a large reflective object underneath the black, avian cemetery...

The forensics team arrived one hour later and laid out their kit in neat lines. The team assessed the carrion for its cause of death and lividity and the sword was swabbed in situ for blood and DNA. Luminol was used to identify any blood stains hidden by the darkness. The whole scene lit up like some kind of conceptual sculpture, the surreal images remaining behind Novák's retinas with each pop and flash of the camera...

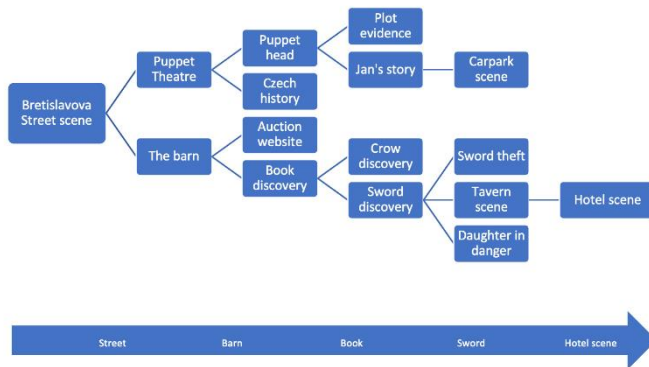
#### Further Commentary on Image 4

The mystery of the barn with its imagined darkness and claustrophobia became a creative place where anything could be discovered. For me, it was like a torch being shed on the

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ideas lurking in my mind. It is important to note that I had not planned or conceived any aspect of these scenes before discovering the barn on the map and there were no images of the inside of the barn itself. The first drafts more or less stayed intact. For me, this was an example of ‘emergence’ as outlined earlier by Hazel Smith.

Diagram 2. A virtual walk results in further plot strands emerging as the writing takes place.



Concluding thoughts and further research

The findings show that using Google Street View can aid the writing process dramatically. The use of the word ‘catalyst’ is a good way to describe how Street View can stimulate ideas and place a scene in a more concrete environment, even if those environments are only hinted at by the initial images (such as the outside of a barn). If images or maps are used in a spontaneous way (i.e., being used while the writing is taking place), the evidence has shown that it can have a powerful effect on the imagination for certain types of writing (i.e., this case being a thriller). If a plot or set of characters are already in motion, the maps can be an essential part of the writer’s process. Imagined places can result in unexpected visual ideas and objects can then be added to the cooking pot of the story.



However, using Street View could result in too much of a linear narrative, whereby in comparison, Joyce's is temporally shifting and sliding. More importantly, the type of writing that Joyce was doing - the result of auto-ethnographic research - one has to wonder how useful Street View would be. Primarily, Joyce was concerned with people's lives and the complex tangle of everyday existence in a rapidly modernising world. So, the main disadvantage of using Street View might be understood as this: Its ability to replace 'real life' with synthetic environments, could result in mediocre work; how can we write compelling human stories if we are merely placing characters in a virtual (sometimes unfamiliar) environment like avatars - or dare I say, puppets - in a computer game? Not being able to physically be in Prague, meet the people and find out how they felt about this legend, made me feel a bit like an imposter when I was writing the book. In fact, I distinctly remember being far more emotionally invested when I wrote Jan Mydlár's 17th Century prologue (not surprisingly because it was based on a real person) than with the characters who occupied the modern part of the book - perhaps because I had simply fabricated them in service of the plot.

This brings us back to the 'type' of writing. Yes, one could argue that there should only be one type. Good writing; that of human experience. But there are so many questions to ask when writing fiction; is the intended writing auto-ethnographic or pure fictional fantasy? Is our writing plot-driven or character driven? Do we intend to portray the world we live in through ethnographic observation or by one high concept? The list goes on... So, no we shouldn't slavishly use Street View and digital images as a crutch for our imagination; the digital tail should not be allowed to wag the living dog. But for the type of writing I was doing; the feeling of emergence was very strong when using Street View. The sensation that the writing process was slightly being pulled out of my hands was thrilling and inspirational. I would like to think that Joyce would be amused by the idea of being able to re-visit his walks in such

vivid detail. I would speculate that this might have produced a different kind of writing altogether.

#### Education using Street View and digital images

As if we needed reminding, the years of the pandemic have shown us that if we are not able to physically meet or go outside, there should be options available to stimulate our ideas (other than reading other writers). If students of writing can't interact with the outside world, for whatever reason, Street View offers a chance to write about it and this aspect of digital technology should be encouraged and embraced. On a personal level, I have had uninspired students come to life when they have been given the chance to describe a virtual walk in a Skype class during the pandemic. One 11-year-old South Korean student described a discarded mattress as being like a 'woolly mammoth' when I asked him to use Street View to help him write about a remembered holiday to Cambodia. Another similarly bored student gleefully showed me what looked like a man vomiting in a Street View image, and then studiously and quietly wrote a story about the dangers of drinking too much. The student later told me that he had an uncle who was an alcoholic and asked if he could write about him; the idea for a piece of serious life writing had been sparked in the mind of a twelve-year-old by a virtual wander. As the saying goes: "If you run out of ideas follow the road; you'll get there". Now that any road in the world can be followed from the comfort of your own desktop, it's up to good writers to see where it leads.

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# STILL HERE, STILL Q(UEE)R: CREATIVE WRITING SAL FOTHERGILL

Please note that in the workshop, the following general information is available with each writing exercise. For the sake of the word count, I have included it here and once only.



\*scans Q(uee)R code\*

Congratulations! You have discovered Still Here, Still Q(uee)R, a queer, psycho-geographical creative writing workshop based here, in this exact spot of Soho!

Cool, what's psychogeography? It might sound complicated but basically, it's the thoughts and feelings we experience when in a certain place. This workshop is for anyone who identifies as queer and wants to contribute to a more inclusive queer-mapping of Soho.

So, how does it work? See the creative writing exercise below. My own response to the prompt is included as an example, but I encourage you to write whatever the hell feels good for you. Your words are important. Write it or record it on your device (or pen and paper if you prefer). Edit it later, or don't. Spelling, punctuation and grammar 'mistakes' are absolutely accepted, if not encouraged as your right to tear down colonial, patriarchal constraints of the English language.

Ok, then what? If you would like your work to be considered for an online zine, send it to [sfoth001@gold.ac.uk](mailto:sfoth001@gold.ac.uk) to find out more. You can be anonymous or credited.

Your data will be protected in line with Goldsmiths University's data protection policy.

Be safe! Ready to write? Just check around you for any hazards. If you feel unsafe for any reason, put yourself first. You can always catch up with the project on instagram [@ourqueerwords](https://www.instagram.com/ourqueerwords)

**Exercise 1: Praise poems for our adored.**

Violet's bar and The Med cafe are sibling institutions of Soho, not least because Violet, who was a resident since 1927, was known as 'Queen of Soho' for her daily presence on Berwick St. A close friend and I used to hang out here, chatting to Violet and unpicking our queer identities. This friend now lives hundreds of miles away but I feel him in this spot so much and I'm so thankful for the time he gave me, so that I could work out my sexuality and gender. As a thank you, I wrote him a praise poem.

St Lawrence

Dear Saint Lawrence; Archdeacon of Soho,  
When I pass your church-The Med cafe You swell in my heart.  
My sacred heart,  
Which adores you dearly and true.  
Remember those nights filled with gay hymns?  
Gay hymns and crypt-in lock-ins.  
It was here, that we ate peaches and plums fresh from Eden.  
Devouring our sins, with joy  
As we peeled them off of the fruits of your fathers' labours.

-

It was here that I began to understand, Myself in relation to this space.

With you.

Here, right here in this church with its pews of perfect unholyness

And with the Sinners

Whom we adored

And were becoming.

-

Your sermons were good, they were always good, And sometimes, you were angry.

'The blood of them was shed for you,' you'd shouted at me,

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'Don't you see, the blood of many men means I can be here, now, more free.' I am not a man.

But in that moment...you helped me understand, what had been lost.

Your fathers,

Your teachers.

-

They say the book of your miracles is lost now, But I do not agree.

Your miracles are RIGHT HERE in the everyday Spiritual works of mercy written on every brick of our lives, still concrete.

Before I even knew you, you were sewn into the fabric of the hills where I am from. The same hills you chose to die on, before you gave in to your body.

-

It was here that you lay down your soul and revealed to us in full

the burden you carried across your limber back.

I will never forget,

The pain in your eyes as it searched for your lost history

And instead of finding it you told us

Now, now we will just have to make a new one:

a corporal act of mercy

for,

Ourmxn

Your turn: Find a comfortable spot looking at the Med Cafe and Violets or, if able and inclined, join them for a beverage to drink in this historical queer spot.

Imagine yourself here, sharing this space with someone you admire and adore. Who comes to mind first? You may personally know them well, or not. Write them a praise poem and tell them how you are in this space together. Really go for it, the grander and more verbose the better.

What is a praise poem? A praise poem is a tribute to someone you love and admire. Often they employ religious and spiritual language and references (from any religion/spiritual practice) in order to pedestal the subject of the poem.

Thank you for your time, space and words.

**Exercise 2: Plan a Play, Outside Soho Theatre.**

Soho Theatre has been a home for radical theatre since the 1970s. It has been through a number of iterations in its time, just like a phoenix. Currently, Soho Theatre is a charity and social enterprise, championing queer cabaret, theatre and comedy. It was here that I had a monumental argument with my ex girlfriend and also here, where I met a new bunch of queer pals. It remains one of the most inclusive LGBTQ+ establishments in Soho. I found that just standing in front of it staring at the programme of events stuck to the window, can provide heaps of inspiration for writers/creators/performers etc.

Complete the writing prompts below and you will have an outline of a play. Alternatively, choose a show title as a prompt and just write whatever comes to mind. You could also sit inside the theatre to do this.

Select the name of a show from the programme in front of you. Choose the one that pulls you to it.

Choose your family

Which title do you choose: Oh mother • This is a play about: yearning.

This is a show about: making choices vs choices being made for you.

The main character is: a queer millennial, white, gender queer afab futch type.

The thing that they want more than anything is: to be a parent, in a queer way, just not quite yet.

Just before the interval, there is a problem: the main character finds out that their ex partner just gave birth and they feel conflicted about it as the topic of children had been particularly contentious in their relationship. The lights change to show a change in mood.

What happens after the interval? A flash back to an argument that the main character and their ex had, in Soho, years ago after a Hannah Gatsby show. The argument was about queer parenting (the ex said it wasn't possible, that it would be cruel to give a kid queer parents-the main character disagreed).

The last lines of the play could be: about the continual search for some sort of parenthood that fits in with the lifestyle of

the main character and what it means to be queer and wanting to have a family/ acknowledging chosen family as just as important.

Finally, come up with a title for this play, based on what you have written and which is different to the one you selected from in front of you.

Your turn. Use the same prompts or come up with your own ones. Who knows, you might plan a show that one day ends up on stage here.

Thank you for your time, space and words.

### **Exercise 3: List Poems in Soho Square**

Look around. Here is our headquarters: our space. In this square, we can gather, revolt, and resist. For me, this is one of the only public spaces in Soho that is often occupied by queer people. Here's a list-poem about this space, inspired by the Trans+ pride march in June 2021. A list of us

That iconic cottage!

dry patches of grasssss flickered ash

headphones

coffee blue streaks tight shorts purple pocket, yellow pocket  
ice lollies, flower lollies

Marsha.

ironic iconic moustaches

Vests

So many Vests

Masks

Lots of Masks

Medium-size dogs wearing bandanas

Solidarity

A fully grown Pup

Leashed by their owner Red umbrella

solidarity

8

Sunglasses bare backs nipples

Tinnies sucked dry

Daisy chains Facts:

TRANS PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS EXISTED Demands:  
PROTECT TRANS KIDS NOW

Basics:



TRANS RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

Someone laughing, then they're crying. Dungarees in 20 degrees shaved heads body hair Earrings

Boots

Curls

Braids

Caps

Rings Pins socks and sandals trainers and socks no socks at all  
A pink fuck you to the bobbies in bluePretending peripheral  
police give us back our blue and fuck U wheelchair bicycle  
hanging crystals round the neck.

face paint war paint

makeup

splint sunflower An accordion played for Us

What is a list poem? A list poem is a list of ideas, objects and moments that, when put together, create an image of a culture, scene or identity.

Your turn: there are two suggested ways you can do this exercise (though these are not the only ways-feel free to do your own thing if the space and time of now inspires you).

List what you see. Stop when you feel like it.

If you feel you have a connection to this space (Soho Square) make a list of what it means and represents to you.

Thank you for your time, space and words.

**Exercise 4: POV free write on Berwick Street**

I love this comic and graphic novel shop. The genre feels inherently queer to me. Perhaps because so many comic and graphic novel artists that I like are queer or some way marginalised from the cishetnormscapes we find ourselves battling through. When I was looking in the window one day, I was drawn to a cover with a witch on. I read them as gender queer (projection much?) and I thought, 'if they could speak, what would they say about the people passing by? About the commercial nature of Soho? And what would they try and do to get it back?

I'm a witch, I'm a lover.

OK, so it's assumed these days that just becos im a witch, Im queer? Or vice vice VICE versa? I mean it's true, but i never really seriously thought about the intersection till now, the

venn diagram, the venn diagram like a spell, magical things colliding in the middle

Usually the middle is the safe bit

But i think the middle of the road is actually the most dangerous place to be, so don't just stand there!!! Don't stare. Come and buy me if you like it. Ha, didn't think so-you wouldn't dare.

Queers

Witches

Queers

Witches queeeeeeeeeeeeeerrrrrrrrsssssssss.

HA! Burn the patriarchy, what do YOU have? Cishetnormcaps? (hand off of our liberty caps-we are keeping those) Well did you know that that shit, your shit, is burning like us witches and us queers used to be. Did you? There are so many spells we are putting on you ;-p but mostly, you put them on urselves just by standing there and staring at me.

And yknow, we have all the spells you need to get out of it, all of them. All you have to do is swallow your wealth by which I mean give it out, give out the surplus, give out the surplus, give IT AWAY!

Come one. Come a little closer and talk to meeeeeee.

Will you daaaaaaaaare?...HA

---

Your turn: Free write with a visual prompt. Look in the window and choose a book cover that you are drawn to. Let your eyes guide you to it. Use the book cover as a prompt for writing about this space. Imagine your point of view is the book cover (from a character or a word, whatever) What can you see and sense from this POV and how do you feel about it? Let your words flow as freely as you can. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation or form. You can edit later, or not, like me.

What is freewriting? Freewriting is a process by which you begin writing and you don't stop. Just let the words come out. If you get stuck, repeat a word or phrase until you are ready to move on. You can set yourself a time limit of a few minutes or just write until you feel done.

Thank you for your time, space and words.

### Exercise 5: Overheard in Soho Square

In spring 2006, I visited London with my family. We had a picnic in Soho Square. I remember it vividly-what I was wearing, what I ate, the buzzy atmosphere, the sunshine. Mostly though, I remember overhearing queer people talking. Talking about themselves and their lives. I knew they were queer (or mostly cis-gay men) even though I didn't know. Growing up in rural North Yorkshire, these simple soundbites were the sweetest music - queer time and space effervescing around me. I vowed that one day, I would live in London so that I could be a part of it. And here I am: writing a conversation-soundscape in Soho Square.

That's what they said.

-I did it when teaching, i'd read messages and then forget

-I do that with whatsapp cos I've got previews on, so I read that and then forget

-I've got an Alexa, that helps. It talks to me about my dog being in the house

-Is it one with a camera

-No-but I want one, he spends a lot of time on his own

...

-the dog walker came back once when they didn't know I was there. It was weird hearing someone talking to my dog, but they get on cos they're both gay, haha.

\*

-The most popular things

-Nooooo, ohmigod it's so bad

-Who d'you like

-I saw one woman at the end who was really good-she sounds like Annie lennox and Robyn -Yeah?

-That's the strongest song, it should win.

-I think the UK is a favourite.

-Oh really, I thought we were hated!

-Ever since I've watched it, it's really hit and miss

-Well, ye for like, the last fifteen years

-No backing singers

a toddler walks over and tries to take one of their neatly discarded shoes

Laughter

-she's got good taste!

Your turn: Find a comfortable space and relax. Take a moment to tune in and out of the conversations around you. When you feel ready, begin noting them down. You can stay in one place or move around. Pay attention too, to the people who pass you in conversation. People talk quicker than most of us can type/write, so use whatever shorthand you need to. The idea is to capture moments of the many conversations that happen here. I know you'll be respectful and not write down anything private. Instead, take this as a chance to document some oral histories...

Thank you for your time, space and words.

Still Here, Still Q(uee)R: Academic Commentary

A queer-centered psychogeographical writing workshop based in Soho, London.

I grew up in a working class, market town in rural North Yorkshire. At 13, I knew I was queer but there were no queer spaces to go. My girlfriend and I would wander to the outskirts of the small town, hoping to discover secret spots where we could safely be ourselves. Reflecting on my experience, and similar testimonies from queer friends, I believe it is important to have and to protect what Halberstem (2005, p.6.) refers to as:

“Queer space” [that is] the place making practices withing postmodernism in which queer people engage ... and the new understanding of space [which is] enabled by the production of queer counterpublics.

This creative writing project aims to draw upon the queer space (and time) of Soho, London by triangulating psychogeography, queer theory, and interactive fiction to generate creative writing. I believe psychogeography can be used as a pedagogical approach to inspire in-situ creative writing: prompts, scaffolding and pedagogical instructions are accessed through QR codes that are situated in a mix of personally important and historically/culturally significant sites in Soho. Queerness is elicited by the social histories of the location, via my identity and through the application of queer theory.

Rationale

### **Why psychogeography?**

In 2020 during the UK lockdown, I became interested in psychogeography and later found an online module led by Queer Extension (2021). Participants self-fashioned 'armour' inspired by queerness, the pandemic and psychogeographical practices. Then, I joined a writing group called Queerscapes, hosted by Out on the Page, and found a reading list of queer psychogeographical texts. Within these texts - of which there are a limited amount (Bridger, 2013) - there are far fewer still written by those identifying as trans, cis-women, and people of colour. So, I wanted both to add my voice as a queer gender fluid person to the discourse, but also to create a pedagogical pathway for other diverse voices to join the psychogeographic movement (and moment).

Psychogeography is pedagogically useful as a creative writing framework because it is concrete, by which I mean the stimulus is immediate, obvious, easily accessible and explainable as relating to the space in which one finds oneself: a solid foundation upon which to begin. But also, by intertwining subjective experiences of the environment within the creative brief, psychogeography provides a great freedom for personal expression.

Turning to Debord, who coined the term itself in 1955 as: the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals. (2006, p. 5)

I understand psychogeography as the thoughts, emotions and feelings you experience in a space, which in turn can affect your interactions with it - the writing unveiling personal and collective histories that construct peoples' identities and the architectures of space.

The QR codes could be 'stumbled upon' which is important when promoting Debord's (1958) emotional discovery of an urban environment, the *dérive*. They do not follow a particular order (though they are numbered so that enthusiastic participants may look for the other exercises) and aside from having the overarching themes of the project in common, the exercises do not intentionally connect. I hope

that this flexibility in how the workshop is structured and located, will encourage more people to spontaneously engage.

**Why Interactive?**

...he took a small console from his bag and started typing. I imagine he stored words and phrases in this machine that might be useful back in time. (Jenks, Tsukanda and Jackson 2021, p.34.)

A smart device is convenient if you are inspired by a moment or a scene, or perhaps a memory is triggered by a place or sound and you want to record it quickly. Because of their instant nature, Kim (2021) points to smart phones as a useful tool in aiding a student's written engagement with psychogeographical tasks.

Using interactive technology also means that the project can run for an unspecified amount of time without my physical presence, allowing it to reach more people than a capped-capacity workshop. It will also remove the physical role of 'teacher', which can be a fear for some students when doing creative writing (Elbow, 1998).

Finally, by using QR codes that people scan with their devices, the project promotes informed consent, an important ethical consideration. Participants control their level of engagement with the project and whether or not they want to submit their work (anonymously or credited) to an online zine that will showcase the project.

**Why Soho?**

The *dérive* also promotes getting lost in order to discover (Debord, 1958). This feels especially apt for me because time and time again, it has been in Soho where I have found forgotten, queer parts of myself. I have journalled here, voice recorded lines of poetry and found creative prompts. My own psychogeographical relationship with Soho has been fertile and rewarding and I wanted to find out how others felt by creating this (digital) writing space.

Halberstam (2005) argues that (in the West) queer time and queer space usually manifest to oppose the cishetero-norms that our neo-liberal society is built on. They claim it is important to reshape queer time and space in order to protect it (Halberstam, 2005). To understand other people's

relationships with Soho, I read poetry collections by Scott (2018) and Taylor (2021) (respectively named *Soho* and *C+unto & Othered Poems*) and felt moved to contribute to Soho's creative writing legacy of queer space.

It is worth considering that one of the limitations of situationist psychogeography is that most places are still situated in the male gaze (Bridger, 2013). Furthermore, Cutting, (2015) cites 1930s initiatives to get young people learning outdoors as fascist attempts at disguising capital-driven urbanisation, thus painting a problematic foundation of outdoor learning. Although important to understand this history, I see this project as less of a teaching and learning process and more a creative interaction with a space that is historically anti-establishment. Furthermore, children are not my intended audience and so I have not centred them as such. Positively, there is inclusively queer history in Soho. In 2021, Historic England published a virtual map entitled '130 Years of Queer Soho (or thereabouts)'. The map sites important locations such as Old Compton Street and the Queer Valentine carnival, at which Peter Thatchell renamed the street 'Queer Street' (Historic England, 2021). Despite the shops and bars mostly catering for cis-gay men, Soho is for queer people and so is this project, which will construct alternatives to and challenge the male gaze by inviting all queers to write themselves in.

Finally, I chose Soho as an act of resistance to the cis het cityscapes and the corporate rainbow washing that continues. Campkin and Marshall's (2017,p.6.) report on London's LGBTQ+ infrastructure highlighted 'a net loss of 58% of venues' since 2006. Unsurprisingly, they found that venues and service providers who centered LGBTQ+ BAME people, queer cis women and trans people, were affected the most (Campkin and Marshall, 2017). However, there are communities willing to resist this pattern (Shariatmadari, 2019), and this project aims to engage people with such resistance by using creative writing to form conscious connections with the space.

Creative Writing.

Creative writing has always been a form of activism; a way of platforming underrepresented voices. Art and activism is a way of challenging the capitalisation of urban landscapes and remapping space to fit those who use it (Debord, 1958; Vaneigem, 1967). All creative writing should be allowed to wander as it pleases, without the worry of being 'good' (Bridger, 2013; Elbow, 1998) These wandering voices are all part of Soho's queer communities and all deserve page space. By naming the project Still Here, Still Q(uee)R, I welcome their writing regardless of which letters of LGBTQIA+ they identify with.

Furthermore, I found it especially important to iterate that 'correct' spelling, punctuation and grammar is not necessary. Not only can concern with these hinder a writer's creative output, but Wyse (2022) asks if it really matters as in a school setting, grammar teaching has virtually no impact on children's writing abilities. Although my project is not aimed at a particular age group, it was important to me, to step away from my professional position as a teacher, and be a more authentic version of myself.

I structured each exercise using a different form of creative writing that I have encountered on this module: including freewriting, praise poems, using visual, written and auditory prompts and list poems.

### **Ethical Considerations**

#### **Personal privilege**

As an able-bodied, educated, white person, I hold privilege in our society. I can wander through Soho and feel like I belong enough to stop and type on my phone (although only in daylight). I tried to consider those that may not share these privileges by basing two of the exercises in Soho Square- a (usually) safe space for queers where there are benches to sit on. However, I acknowledge that this workshop is not currently radically inclusive and pose improvements at the end of this essay.

#### **Road safety**

Due to traffic and large volumes of people, it can be difficult to simply 'wander' Soho in the way that the *dérive* encourages. I highlighted personal safety as the start of each exercise.



### Queerphobia

People may take part in this project as a joke, perhaps even submitting queer phobic writing. If they do, I will take their words, cut them up and re-use them in the spirit of 'uncreative writing' Goldsmith (2011) to create something that celebrates queerness.

### **The process**

#### **Psychogeographical pedagogies in practice.**

In his paper 'English Teaching: Practice and Critique', Green (2013) suggests that personal understandings of space and place can be used as pedagogical and theoretical lenses to read the city. Massey (2005) highlights the importance of thinking about space differently-as something inherently creative. I adopted this lens and wrote in Soho for as much of this project as possible. Doing so, it felt authentic and purposeful for me to triangulate psychogeography, queer theory and creative writing, thus testing this pedagogical approach.

Reynolds (2016) highlights the huge potential for learning in environments away from seated classroom dynamics. He proposes a drive towards redefining learning spaces in order to ignite the cognitive process in students and teachers. As a classroom teacher, I was fascinated by Reynolds' (2016) research on psychogeographical classroom seating. I wondered, if I placed some of the QR codes next to doors, would they be accessed more than others? I await the results with interest as this could potentially point to an next research project: psychogeography of the outdoor classroom.

Psychogeography though, is more than just the psychological effects of the urban environment on the individual. It could be a condition for imagination and creativity such as that which drives Xavier de Maistre's (2016) 1774 novel, *Voyage Around My Room* (which I aptly discovered during covid confinement). The main idea I took from this text was to find inspiration in the everyday, that creativity can be born out of an intentional conscious experience with spaces we take for granted. Jackson (1982) agrees that psychogeography has intangible properties that can only be described through a conscious experience. As such, I wrote instructions to encourage writers to notice details in the space, either visually

like Exercise 3 - List poems in Soho Square, or auditorily like Exercise 5 - Overheard in Soho. Of course, these exercises rely on being able to see/hear, which could exclude some writers and is something I realised as a pitfall of using psychogeography as a pedagogy.

I include my own in-situ creative writing response to each exercise because research shows that when a creative writing teacher shares their work and encourages the sharing of writing, pedagogies are more effective (Cremin & Myhill 2012). This is also why I gave people the option to share their work for publication. I also gave an example of psychogeographical writing, because when I first heard the term, I considered it 'too academic' and I disengaged. I did not want others to feel this way. On the Queer Extensions course, seeing examples of the facilitator's work was helpful in developing my understanding of what psychogeography can 'look' like. I also modelled my thinking in the exercises, including how I came to know the space and come up with the exercise as this can support writers in their own work (Bai, 2018).

Perhaps it's that you can't go back in time, but...the places are what remain, are what you can possess, are what is immortal. They become the tangible landscape of memory, the places that made you, and in some way you too become them. Sonlit (2006).

I resonate with this quote from Sonlit's multi-genre book on loss and getting lost. During this process, I have felt moved by the very site/sight of my past self, coming to terms with my sexuality and gender, which would bring me to writing this assignment. I was nostalgic, for the present moment as well as the past and it felt grounding to commemorate this with creative writing. If I had needed experiential evidence to back up Sonlit's (2006) claim that spaces are a scaffold for memory, I had it.

### **Exercise 1: Praise Poems for our Adored**

I adore the religious language used in praise poems and it seemed appropriate to me to write one on Berwick Street, looking at Violet's, a bar named after the 'Queen of Soho' herself. (Violet's, 2022). As I started writing, it became clear

that the poem was not about Violet, whom I barely knew, but my best friend who has sat with me in Violet's cafe many times, unravelling our queer trauma. The power of psychogeography here, felt cathartic. In sharing a part of this story I invite others to do the same. The 'Your turn' section asks the writer to imagine sharing the space with someone they admire and adore?' adding a psychogeographical element to the praise poem exercise that Taylor (2022) taught in session three.

### **Exercise 5: Overheard in Soho Square**

This exercise was inspired by an experience I had as a teenager, on a day trip to London. I sat in Soho Square and absorbed the queer conversations around me. I had finally found a queer space and I still remember vividly, snippets of conversation. Mills (2004) highlights the important role that sound plays when writing to capture a scene which led me to create this exercise. It was also when creating and doing this exercise that I ended up teaching myself something new about my own gender, which honestly, moved me greatly.

#### **Discoveries**

In both researching and creating this workshop, I have discovered the following:

Psychogeography can and does work as a pedagogy for creative writing. I felt consciously moved to write in each location I chose. Perhaps, this is partly due to the personal relationship I have with these locations, which I hope extends to others too.

It was difficult to find academic texts that were queer, somewhat intersectional and about psychogeography. Add creative writing to this search and the selection narrows further. In the end, I think this project is much more about facilitating and inspiring creative writing, than teaching any particular skill.

As aforementioned, this project is not radically inclusive and it would be important to collaborate with queer practitioners of colour, trans practitioners, disabled practitioners, if a group of us wanted to push this further. An online version could also widen participation.

I shared a number of the creative writing exercises that I have learnt on this module, and I feel empowered to have passed those on to others, who will possibly do the same. Finally, I believe I have met the aim of this assignment: draw upon the queer space (and time) of Soho, by triangulating psychogeography, queer theory, and interactive fiction to generate creative writing. The creative writing part of this assignment is my own evidence of this.

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