

Diversity and Inspiration

Creative Writing Gets Different

EDITED BY DEBORAH FRIEDLAND, GABRIEL TROIANO
AND FRANCIS GILBERT

Creative Writing Gets Different

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Dr. Francis Gilbert, September 2022.

DEDICATION

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

Table of Contents

DEDICATION	3
INTRODUCTION.....	6
PROLOGUE.....	8
BLACK LIVES MATTER: PUPILS' & TEACHERS' WORK	11
STILL WE DIE	12
BLM STUDENT PROTEST AT MY PLACEMENT SCHOOL: REFLECTION ...	14
A TRIP TO BURGESS PARK TO TALK ABOUT BLACK LIVES MATTER AND WRITE A POEM	15
TEACHER, HIRA MEHTAB'S WORK	19
WORK BY PUPILS AT CARDINAL POLE CATHOLIC SCHOOL.....	26
WORK BY PUPILS AT PLUMSTEAD SCHOOL	29
WORK BY PUPILS AT ST RICHARD REYNOLDS CATHOLIC COLLEGE	31
WHITE SUPREMACY AND OUR ENGLISH LITERATURE CURRICULUM ...	45
LEARNING THROUGH CREATIVE WRITING	63
STORYTELLING AND EXPRESSIVE WRITING IN CREATIVE WRITING	
MEGAN ABLES	64
SOCIAL JUSTICE AND VISIONARY FICTION ELLA ASHERI	80
HOW CAN I FEEL SAFE WHEN WRITING CREATIVELY? SARA CARROLL	100
JAMES BALDWIN AND ME: DEBORAH FRIEDLAND	116
A PLACE OF BELONGING: ASYA KARDZHALIYSKA	133
THE TALE OF THREE SISTERS: SARAH KINGDON.....	147
BUT ARE YOU SURE IT'S YOUR PLACE? ALASTAIR WARNER	162
WRITING FOR MOTHERS: LUCY WILLIAMS	180
WORKSHOPS AND LESSON PLANS	199
DIARIES, MEMORIES AND THE SENSES NICOLE FERSCO	200
SPACE AND PLACE: DEBORAH FRIEDLAND.....	215
CREATIVE WAYS OF TEACHING ESL STUDENTS: TAMADER ISSA	241
SALUTATIONS! WARREN PORTER.....	264
PROPOSING POETRY WORKSHOPS FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS: ZAHRA JALEEL	280
POETRY AS A MEANS OF EXPLORING, HEALING, AND NARRATIVES...	280

Inspiration and Diversity

CREATIVE RESPONSES TO MUSIC AND MINDFULNESS: GABRIEL TROIANO	299
WHERE PATHS COME TOGETHER WITH OTHER PATHS: RYAN WHATLEY.....	322
TEACHERS AND CREATIVE WRITING: RAHWA WOLDU	341
ABOUT THE AUTHORS	362

INTRODUCTION

FRANCIS GILBERT

Welcome to the Inspiration and Diversity anthology, produced by students on the MA in Creative Writing and Education degree course and the Postgraduate Certificate for Education in teaching English course. Much of the work here was produced and written during the Covid pandemic of 2020-21, but is now being published a year later. The editors Deborah Friedland and Gabe Troiano are both alumni of the MA in Creative Writing and Education and worked tirelessly to edit the anthology over the past year, as well contributing their own pieces. The pandemic and the aftermath of the George Floyd murder can be felt keenly in this anthology; local school children in South London have written movingly about the Black Lives Matter movement, speaking deeply from personal experience, while many of the pieces have explored the ways in which diversity can be celebrated by writing creatively.

The range of material is massive: from teacher-training materials for English as Second Language learners to notes for expectant mothers on how to write expressively about pregnancy, from marvellous stories aimed at school children with a focus upon teaching them about disability, the evils of prejudice and the healing nature of art, to essays on the influence of James Baldwin and guidance about using mindfulness to fuel the imagination, you will find a carnival of topics here.

However, there is coherence too; there's a focus upon the need to be compassionate, to contextualise learning and art within its social context, and to experiment constantly to find answers. The values of the modern creative educator come across again and again in the pieces: there's a confidence in the principles that underpin effective creative writing pedagogy, which are, for me, these key concepts:

Inspiration and Diversity

- A commitment to generating creative ‘flow’; activities which enable writers to switch off their inner critic and ‘go for it’
- A passion for reading widely and critically
- A generosity of spirit and a zest to build communities of writers in all different walks of life...

I do hope you enjoy this anthology as much as I enjoyed supervising its creation and editing, as well as reading it. If you are interested in learning more about the degree and the authors’ work, do get in touch with me.

*Francis Gilbert, Head of the MA in Creative Writing and Education,
September 2022, Goldsmiths. **F.gilbert@gold.ac.uk***

PROLOGUE

DEBORAH FRIEDLAND
AND GABRIEL TROIANO

The teacher is of course an artist, but being an artist does not mean that he or she can make the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves.

Paolo Freire

As children, we are born into this world with the gift of creativity, with the serenity and knowledge that the spaces we inhabit and the people who surround us are meant to be cherished and loved unconditionally. It is therefore intrinsic to us to explore, to grow, and to learn. This spirit, for the grace of the evolutionary nature of our existence, was called upon more than ever at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced our civilizations to stop and seek shelter. We've all been put through one of the biggest 'centripetal' forces in recent history. For many, the experience of mandatory lockdowns and subsequent avoidance of outside life granted us a new opportunity to take the plunge and discover the secrets of our minds. This space, a fertile ground for new discoveries and insights, is what brings us to this anthology, which celebrates creativity and the act of teaching it through one of the oldest artforms – writing.

As any writer knows, creative writing education comes from authenticity and a genuine desire to bring balance to ideas and feelings that when 'unscrambled,' haunt us in the middle of the night. The writers in this book are not only making sense of their realities, but of the realities and experiences of the ones lucky enough to be educated by what we like to call 'creative educators.' To creatively educate and to make use of creative writing pedagogies is to empower, and most importantly, to inspire. And the remains of brighter, Covid-free days still linger

Inspiration and Diversity

on us with the possibility of this mission, to return to a childlike state of discovery and unbothered imagination.

Everything you read here is the fruit of the hard work and dedication of the contributors, and also a reflection of the unwavering support of Goldsmiths University, where the contributors have had the privilege of studying. In particular, INSPIRE 2 would not exist without the support and inspiration of Dr Francis Gilbert, the Head of the MA in Creative Writing & Education at Goldsmiths and Dr Vicky Macleroy, Head of the Centre for Language, Culture and Learning. To Francis, we cannot thank you enough for your steadfast steer through the challenges of studying during the pandemic, your warmth and your wisdom.

The essays, personal accounts, poetry, and creative responses collected for this anthology draw inspiration from an open-ended range of sources to develop both personal and professional lines of inquiry. We invite you to immerse yourself in the dazzling spectrum of diverse and inspirational ideas that are shared here, from pupils' writing inspired by the consciousness-raising questions of the Black Lives Matter movement to reflections on therapeutic writing techniques and the ancient Greek art of ekphrasis.

When teaching creative writing, practitioners elicit, invite, and encourage. Students are offered a safe space from which to explore the multitudes within, where they may discover new modes of expression and individuated tools for meaning making.

As you journey into these pages wrought with care and dedication, may you also live in the spirit of creative exploration, of uninhibited curiosity, which brings us not only close to the wonderful act of writing, but the honourable duty of teaching it.

We would like to thank the intrepid contributors and we invite you to share their dreams and be inspired!

Creative Writing Gets Different

**BLACK LIVES MATTER:
PUPILS' & TEACHERS'
WORK**

STILL WE DIE

STEVE ROBERTS

Harriet kept the Railroad running

Still we die

Jacko Negres Mawons and the Maroons

Burn down the plantations

Still we die

Martin Luther King

He Dreamed and he Marched

Still we die

Rosa rode peacefully

Still we die

Malcolm X he Preached

'By any means necessary'

Still we die

Maya Angelou say 'Still I Rise'

Still we die

Bob Marley chant 'Get Up Stand Up'

Still we die

His Imperial Majesty address the UN

Still we die

Madiba Mandela presided with dignity

Humility and forgiveness

Still we die

Angela Davis shout 'Black and Proud'

Still we die

Stephen Lawrence Report

Call out Institutional Racism

Still we die

INQUEST search for Truth and Justice

Still we die

Tottenham Toxteth and Brixton

Burn to the ground

Still we die

LeBron he done take a knee

Still we die

George Floyd pleaded 'I Can't Breathe'

Then Breathed No More

He should be the last

No more shall we die

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BLM STUDENT PROTEST AT MY PLACEMENT SCHOOL: REFLECTION

ANON

On May 21st, there was a disturbance at the school. At around 11am during breaktime, Year 10 students had congregated on the playground and refused to come inside. All students were sat on the playground refusing to budge. Some students were adorned in shower caps and wore face glitter spelling out 'BLM' on their foreheads. Soon, the entire playground filled with the chorus of 'BLACK LIVES MATTER ...BLACK LIVES MATTER!'

As it transpired, there had been an incident involving an RE teacher and a student. The student had reportedly donned a henna tattoo, something against the school's uniform policy. When said teacher attempted to sanction the student, the situation escalated, and tensions rose. Following this incident, all students had orchestrated the protest via a WhatsApp group. While some students had engaged in peaceful protest, others had taken it as an opportunity to engage in disruptive behaviour, with many running amok. Teachers were unsettled by the events as it was complete bedlam. Throughout the day more year groups joined in and before long the entire school had descended into chaos, so much so, no classes could be taught.

As a PGCE student observing from the side-lines, I felt concern for some of the students, particularly those belonging to Year 7, who were distressed and bewildered. I walked around the playground offering help and support, engaging with them to learn how they were feeling. I had discerned a mix of emotions—part anger, part sadness. It was an unusual and rare experience, but I felt I had learnt a lot about maintaining calm in a high-pressure situation. Also—and most importantly—I had witnessed first-hand, the power of expression amid students who felt wronged by an institution.

A TRIP TO BURGESS PARK TO TALK ABOUT BLACK LIVES MATTER AND WRITE A POEM

MAGDALENA ALVAREZ ICAZA JACKSON

After sending off the application for the approval of an educational visit, alongside the risk assessment and the GTP travel route, after composing and begging the students to ask parents to sign and return the permission slips for the trip, after the phone calls home and planning all the activities and making sure we had all that was needed (e.g., lanyards with the school's name and phone number, poems to be shared and blueberry muffins, of course), we finally set off to Burgess Park. The 'we' in question were two teacher-students on the brink of finishing their PGCE and five Year 7 students who had been selected to go on this trip based on their answers to the question: 'Why do you want to go on a school trip to talk about Black Lives Matter and write a poem?' (Their behaviour in lessons had also influenced our decision).

We got there, sat under a gigantic oak, and talked about what was meant by the word 'prejudice.' The other teacher-student and I didn't say much; the students did most of the talking. They gave definitions and examples too, not only about what they'd heard and learned in school, but about their own lives. One of the students, black and no older than 12, slightly tall for his age, talked about being stopped and searched by a security guard at a shop after he'd gone in and left without buying anything. We talked about how that had made him feel. Immediately after that, we read our first poem: *Things I Have Stolen* by Caleb Femi. We talked about why people steal stuff. We talked about why some might be blamed instead of others. We talked about fairness and fear, and the feeling of doing the right thing and it never being good enough.

Creative Writing Gets Different

One of the students—a girl who moved with her family to the UK when she was a young child—talked about the hostility she perceived on first arrival to the country. She talked about wearing a hijab and how she felt it drew attention to herself. We then read Dean Atta's *I Come From*: 'I come from crossing oceans to find myself,' he writes. We asked the students to go through the poem again and choose one or two lines that they liked or thought were important. They did. They all shared what they chose and explained why they had chosen it. I shared the line I had chosen and so did the other teacher-student. We both have a dual nationality. It struck me at that moment how it was that we had coincided and what a privilege it was to be doing this with another fellow teacher, to be listening to all of these stories and thoughts around poems written by poets that are not part of the English curriculum and yet can bring out of students a series of reflections and understanding about the world that surpass expectations.

D., eleven years old, sat next to me. She said that, like Mr Atta, she was mixed race. She said how odd this had felt, why couldn't she just blend in? She'd been the target of bullying by both black and white students alike ever since she could remember. The other four students looked at her in disbelief. They all talked about different experiences related to fitting in—or not. What shocked me was that two of the students who were willing to do most of the sharing were the quietest in lessons. I was also impressed by the fact that many of the things they shared were things they had heard or read on the news or on social media; stories poured out of their mouths nonstop: a black boy who got a scholarship to go to a posh school, a black girl who was harassed on the tube, a black man who returned a stolen bike he found on the street and was accused of stealing it himself. We hardly talked about Black Lives Matter as such. There was hardly any need to mention it—it was intrinsic to our conversation.

Then, when we had half an hour left, we set ourselves to write a poem stimulated by our discussion. It could be, we explained, about anything related to the ideas or feelings that had sprung from our conversations and the poems we'd read. Some students

had brought a notebook, others asked for a piece of paper. We all began writing and, seconds after we'd begun, we heard music blasting out of a speaker some distance away from us. The students recognised the lyrics and they sang along, but we all gradually realised that it would be impossible to write. I looked around and saw that the owners of the speaker were two young girls having a picnic. I said I'd go talk to them and ask if they could lower their music, but all the students jumped at the suggestion. One of the students got up and said: 'Let's just go somewhere else.' I said that there was nothing wrong with asking. Once again, they implored me not to say anything. Maybe they were afraid that these girls would get angry, say something mean. Maybe they felt embarrassed. None of them explained what it was, they just continued to say that I shouldn't go. But I did. I got up and went to these two young women. I kneeled next to them and briefly, politely, with a big smile on my face, explained that I was a teacher and that we had come on a school trip to write about Black Lives Matter. I asked if they could lower their music for 20 minutes so that the students could get on with the writing and that then we'd be off; I was so sorry to inconvenience them. They didn't even hesitate, they said that that was a lovely idea and they turned off the speaker.

I went back to the students who were gaping at me as if I had performed a miracle. They clapped and asked: 'How did you do it, Miss?' I thought that it was almost ironic that we, in our little group, had been talking for an hour already about not assuming things regarding other people and yet we had done it ourselves seconds before writing poems about prejudice, about the lack of dialogue, about the insecurities and misunderstandings we live with every day. Silence reigned as we all sat and wrote our poems. We read them to each other. We shared some thoughts about our writing. This time, the students picked lines that they had liked from each other's poems without us asking them to and they explained why they'd done so. Then, after throwing all the blueberry muffin wrappers in the bin and saying thank you to the nice ladies who'd turned off their music so that we could write, we walked through the park, back to school.

I leave you with the poem D. wrote that day:

THIS IS ME

By D

Curry chicken and rice and peas
Sunday roast, potatoes and turkey.
Braiding my hair for school
On Monday
waiting two weeks just to see
him crying when I had
to leave him.
Massive parties and police coming
barely hearing myself talk over the music
days out being asked if I'm
safe with mummy or dad.
Being stared at when I'm with them.
Thinking I was an alien to knowing
I'm human.
Now I'm older I know these
stares and comments were wrong.
I love my mum and dad, I'm safe
with them.

TEACHER, HIRA MEHTAB'S WORK

ANON

Some of the following poems are on the topic of colourism, as this is a massive issue within the South Asian community. Unfortunately, people are judged by their skin colour and diminished if they have darker skin.

In Pakistan, a country with a hot climate, where the citizens are predominantly brown-skinned, I grew up learning the importance of having 'light skin.' To this day, I still get shocked when I see these prejudices within society. As a young girl, I watched TV shows which promoted lightening creams, and people were very openly colourist towards those with darker skin. I would constantly hear the older generation telling the younger generation to 'wash' their face properly, use whitening creams, and put on some makeup to look lighter. Looking back at these early years of my life, I feel disgusted by the prejudices that surrounded me.

As I grew up in the UK, I made friends with people of all backgrounds; never once did I think that someone was lesser than me because of the colour of their skin. As I went back to Pakistan for a holiday, I soon realised that these prejudices are deep-rooted in the Pakistani community. It would be difficult to convince people that skin colour does not influence people's worth. During this holiday, I was approached by many people that live in my village. I was praised for my 'fair' skin. People asked me what face creams I used and how I looked after my skin. I can never forget one incident when my aunt asked: 'You don't like my son, right? He has dark skin but light eyes', bearing in mind that this was a two-year-old we were talking about. I was astonished by this remark. I found it hard to comprehend how a parent could talk about their child like that. Unfortunately, others had made these comments about my cousin in front of my aunt,

and as I tried to convince her that my cousin's skin colour was beautiful, she thought I was lying to keep her heart.

Thankfully as the world is starting to recognise these prejudices, the younger community in Pakistan have taken a stand against them. They are fighting to get rid of these injustices within society. I hope that one day these prejudices completely vanish from society.

COLOURISM

BROWN-SKINNED GIRL

By Anon

Dear brown-skinned girl,
With a beautiful soul
You've been put down all your life.

Just because of your curls,
your skin,
How you talk,
you'll never win.

They dismiss your talent.
They dismiss your drive.
But nothing will stop your achievements.
Because you push with all your might.

Hey brown-skinned girl,
Don't worry.
Their opinions do not diminish your worth
So there is no need to hurry.
Your strength is overshadowed by what they say,
But nothing will dim the light you shine every day.

Hey brown-skinned girl,
Stand tall.

Stand proud.
Stand beautifully.
Fight back.
And you will be just fine.

WHO DECIDED...

By Anon

Why is my worth measured by the colour of my skin?

Who decided I'm prettier when fair,
but dark skin makes me dull?

Why do they all say?
Did you wash your face today?
Maybe you should use some lightning cream.
Wash away your impurities
Maybe straighten your hair as your curls look messy

Oh, compared to your sister, you've got darker skin
no boy would like you with such a dark face
maybe your homemaking skills will appeal a bit more
Can you cook? Clean?
Make a man yours?

Instead, I should hear.

Oh, beautiful girl with beautiful brown skin
You are perfect the way you are
Your skin has a wonderful amount of melanin
You are doing so well
In a society that won't let you win.

So stand tall
And fight against it all.
Hoping one day, it all stops.

BLACK LIVES MATTER!

STAND UP!

By Anon

As they bring another one down
The world stands in uproar.
To hold his crown.

We stand against prejudices of any kind
But especially what our black brothers and sisters experience
day and night.

Young black boys stopped and searched
Questioned about being in gangs or for any weapons on
hand.
While others were shot and suffocated without a care
People crossing streets out of fear.
These young, naive boys don't know what they have done
wrong
To receive such treatment from everyone.

So as I teach some of these young people in my classroom
I see the hurt in their eyes
My heart breaks for them a million times.
Their beautiful stories overshadowed again.

So as the world takes a stand against these injustices
I protest and pray
That finally, their pain may end
May they walk without fear
May they finally say
'I am free and respected' every day.

IT'S NOT COMING HOME

By Anon

Three brave young men
Working day and night
To achieve England's dream with all their might.

But as the season comes to an end
We lose to Italy
And we know what's to come.

England stands in uproar
They attack!
Comment.
Tweet.
DM.
Disgusting slurs.

They plan to hurt those that get in their way.
While making a game out of abuse.

So don't you dare
Say we are not a racist state.

Bukayo Saka,
Jadon Sancho,
Marcus Rashford,
All so very young.
Committed to achieving their dreams.
But as they end this game
They get attacked by this dreadful society.

While these brilliant footballers stay offline
Their work is appreciated by many others
Who stand to protect.
Their comments are flooded with words of love
To drown out the racist remarks.

So a message to all the racists out there
You may think you're strong
But we are stronger in every possible way.

AS A CHILD

By Mehmet Suleyman

As a child, I remember asking myself do Turkish people write poems.

I had never seen or heard any, so I asked my teacher, and he said they did.

I asked who they were, but he said he didn't know.

I was in year 5 and the thought didn't come back until year 8.

I remember we were studying sonnet 130, the one about the lovers' hair being like wires, and I remember thinking do Turkish people write poems.

I asked my teacher, and she said they did. So I asked who they were, but she didn't know.

Then we learnt about Vernon Scannell, William Blake, Seamus Heaney, Carol Ann Duffy

and I hated poetry. But I loved poems, and the way they made me feel.

I spent my time writing but writing short stories.

and mum said 'go and be a writer, so I did.

I studied a Bachelor's degree in Creative Writing

My tutor read my first short story and invited me into his office.

But before speaking to me he said 'you're a poet

Your short stories are poems, so write poems'

And I remember thinking do Turkish people write poems

So I asked my teacher, and he said they did.

I asked who they were, but he said he didn't know.

But before I left his office, he gave me a book by poet

Anthony Anaxagorou.

He's not Turkish, he's Greek but Cypriot. He from Cyprus
your island.

I left his office and wrote my first poem.
A sonnet, titled 'sonnet #1'

POEMS ON THE BLM MOVEMENT

Ms Mehtab and Ms Din write:

This is a collection of poetry on the topic of Black Lives Matter and black culture and identity.

We conducted a collaborative project in the final week of school as a fun, creative task for the pupils. We were very open to the work we wished for the pupils to create as we wanted them to use their imagination and write their feelings out. In order to get the students to the point where they could write their creative responses, we explored the poem *Checking out me history* by John Agard. After an entire lesson of collaborating ideas, the pupils were ready to do their own poems. Many of the pupils in this class chose to write about celebrating their cultures whilst others expressed their feelings about the injustices within society.

Although the pupils had very strong opinions and views on this topic, they found it challenging to write about it. To accommodate the pupils, we allowed them to work in groups and pairs. Therefore, some of the following poems are collaborative, as some pupils chose to work in pairs. However, not all pupils have been named as their parents wished for them to remain anonymous.

WORK BY PUPILS AT CARDINAL POLE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

BLACK LIVES MATTER

By Gabriela Maria Gomez

I can't breathe.
All this pain and sorrow is making it hard to sleep.
My people on the streets, fighting for our freedom.
Their blood, sweat and tears ain't shed for no reason.

They swore to protect and serve
But yet had the nerve to kill my sister in cold blood.
Breonna Taylor.

BLACK LIVES MATTER

By Hermela Abraham

Black lives matter
They always mattered.
Because of the unfair treatment and inequality
Their voices have been silenced.
Police brutality is wrong
They abuse their power
Hurting families,
Adults and children.
Making them feel depressed,
Along with oppressed.
They are not just criminals and threats.
They are very nice.
So don't hold grudges
Because everyone is different
You should respect everyone.

BLM STANDS FOR BLACK LIVES MATTER

By Serena Kamara

Be careful, boys and girls,
for there are killers out in the world,
Killing you because of your race,
Because of your looks, nails, and braids.
Braiding your way out of slavery plantations,
Braids in your hair like a map of directions.
Hear the cry and feel the pain,
Our brothers and sisters are dying every day.

POEMS ABOUT CULTURE

WHERE I BELONG

By Nathalia Makila

Where I belong is not in this country,
It's where all the people think my country is about poverty,
It's where people think my country ain't strong,
But writing this poem will prove them wrong.

Where I belong is quite far,
That's right; I belong to Madagascar,
I am an African proud, strong, and free,
I'm not those people who are stuck in slavery.

I'm only human like you,
I love music, food and lots more too.
I'm only just trying to be myself,
Yet you judge by telling me I'm something else.

So go on, keep on judging me
But no one will try to stop my identity.

Where I belong is not in this country,
It's where I know my country is free.

MY CULTURE

By Shiphrah Dei

My culture is the best,
In Africa, it comes from the west,
We have a lot of flavourful food,
Each to fit your desired mood.
Our clothes come from the best designers,
You will look good in our attires.
Our music is super neat.
We love to call it afrobeat.
We have the most interesting names.
And the most beautiful braids
(which we like to keep laid)
All of us in Africa are sisters and brothers,
Technically we come from the same mother.
A stereotype of ours is that we are too loud.
Only because we are black and proud.

STUDENT EXPRESSIONS

THEY

By Laurent Mbago Kitoico

They tell us nothing,
They cover the truth
They take our culture
They take our land
They exploit
They are vultures.
They.

ANGER

By Laurent Mbago Kitoico

Anger.
Rage.
The way we get treated brings anger.
We are treated lower than others.
We are treated unfairly,
Because of the colour of our skin.

WORK BY PUPILS AT PLUMSTEAD SCHOOL

By Bibi Speak, Year 8
BLM Diary Entry

Dear Diary,

Today I went to a BLM protest. It was an emotional ride. I did the best I could to spread the word. It went well, and there was a lot of people with me. We went through the streets, encouraging more people to join. I felt proud that so many people had the same idea and they were all so kind. I hope that the people we passed realised the issue and tried to help out too. After the protest, I felt joy and happiness knowing that I put a bit of peace in our world. Even though there are still some rude and racist people that won't change, I know I did all I could to spread the message.

By Diatou, Year 7

Space for creativity, make us believe in ourselves.
We should end racism, we only need help.
People die every day because of their colour.
They have to survive through this hour after hour,
I wish we could all have equality

Creative Writing Gets Different

so we can be one big community.
George said, 'I can't breathe,' at least 28 times,
This is not an accidental rhyme.
2013 was the time where BLM started,
where the white became disheartened.

The ignorant had the power,
yet we protested while the crowd became a tower.
There was not swift movement,
right now, the police makes us feel like a replacement,
I can't take this anymore,
What was all that for?
We are all the same
Saying that does not make me insane.
We act disappointed and dismayed
because aren't we good to you
to match black with blue
Students on their mats await
Eager smiles glow
The instructor turns over the sign
and now begins the flow

FALSE IDENTITY

By Charlie Thorne, Year 7

Everyday a black person is killed
whilst the family wait for justice
for the cop to be wheeled away and restrained.
Ever since the slave trade
Black people have been made a false life,
a life without freedom,
a life of false identity.
And when people say, 'all lives matter' it brings the question,
does everyone deserve equality?
Even those that brought suffering upon others of another race,
forgive them to work with the sun's blistering, hot embrace,
This is false identity.

BLM POEM

By Michelle, Year 7

I can't breathe, I can't breathe
George Floyd pleaded
As the police officer proceeded.
I can't breathe, I can't breathe
people protesting outside my windows
walking around with posters
shouting
Black Lives Matter!
I can't breathe, I can't breathe
Police officers struggling
People fighting for their
home buddies
Black Lives Matter.
Why are they killing my people?
Why do you want to hurt us?
We all matter in this world so
Why do you treat us different?
BLACK LIVES MATTER!

WORK BY PUPILS AT ST RICHARD REYNOLDS CATHOLIC COLLEGE

BLM: THE PROTESTS

By Kacper Beda, Year 7

Then came the words 'I can't breathe,'
And all the people leave,
Fight fight fight,
And all the people bite,
Like dogs when you pass,
And slamming all glass,

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As they both deserve less,
Then came the rest.

Is protest worth this,
When the world is burning,
In front of our eyes,
One step at a time,
Help us to fight crime,
Than say police is brutal,
I hear it every conversation,
Every single tweet,
Just look at the situation,
Both deserve respect and equal rights,
And leave the world with no fights.

It is time to end this nonsense,
This problem is way too old,
Our nannies and grannies did this,
Put the problem in a coffin full of mold,
As peace is the world's gold,
So get out, be friendly to the police,
And fight,
As it is our right.

We can be proud of each other
And not wish for war
Do you think it's good
Is this what you are for?
Look what you have become:
A matter of chaos.
This what you grown to be?
Do it for the future,
For you and for me.

ONCE UPON A TIME

By Elizabeth Compton, Year 7

'Nani! Nani! Tell me a story!' Jasmine's little brother Chulbul (Chul) was yelling. He had just had his bath, so ran into the bedroom dripping water all over their thick patterned rugs. Their mother sighed as she practically wrestled him into his faded navy pyjamas. Jasmine laughed at her mother's goofy face and watched her mother scoop a dozing Chul into her arms and lay him gently in his blue-green bed. He snuggled gratefully into the fluffy depths. Grandma Garima (Nani) smiled weakly at Chul's mischievous antics.

Jasmine sat dutifully on a small stool and began her embroidery work. 'My Yuthika (Indian word for Jasmine vine), what makes you sit? Come, listen, this story will interest you...' Nani had a strange, mystical look in her eyes, and guided her granddaughter on her red and gold bed cover. 'Ok... Nani you sure? Maa promised the landlord I would stitch his sheets...' Jasmine started to protest, but Nani had already started to tell her tale. 'Once upon a time... when I was a girl of only 10, living in the crowded streets of what is now Pakistan... something changed.' Nani reached to squeeze Jasmine's cold hand. 'The people all over India decided they were fighting too much. It was between the Hindi people and the Muslim people. They were so mad at each other that they decided their only option was to split up. They split India into two countries, Pakistan and India. And you know I only lived with my uncle, as my parents were shot by Muslims for being Hindu. So me and my dear Uncle Rashid decided to make our way to the new India, our future home. So, on the day we were set to leave something very strange happened.'

Jasmine sat attentively by her grandmother's side, waiting to see what happened next. 'Me and my classmate Puja were walking along to the market, hoping to sell some embroidery when we saw a dirty truck with a heavy crate on top, just parked next to the street. This was strange, as we had never seen this truck before and there were barely any comings-and-goings in this

part of town so we were very confused at this mysterious vehicle. Then, before we could say anything, two beefy men hopped out of the vehicle and shot us an ugly look. 'Grab them,' the fattest man said to the more muscular one. He grabbed us and held us up to the fat man. He studied our faces closely, then began to speak again. 'Hindu. Healthy. Female.' He seemed to be analysing our most obvious traits. He continued. 'Poorly dressed, but well-fed. Right. Take 'em. Put 'em in the crate.' Puja had started to scream, and I began to yell. But the muscular man shoved two thick dirty rags in each of our mouths. I recognised the sweet tang of gas, and as he lifted me into the crate after Puja, the world faded to black.

'They kidnapped us, the two men, and sold us as slaves. We worked for many families, each master more horrible than the last. They took us in because they said we were minors, black, female, stupid. Somehow, they always sold Puja and me to the same family, claiming we were valuable twins. Soon each master got bored of us, and then it was back to the two men shoving us into our crate, usually with a beating to come with it. Puja and I were beaten often, by both our masters and our captors. They gave us little food, so by 2 years of this both Puja and I were so thin, and struck ill frequently. But we always tried to make the best of it. When we sat in our crate after a beating, we would hold each other close and hope things would get better...' By now, little Chul had succumbed to sleep, and only Jasmine sat awake, with Nani.

'And then one day, someone saw the two men dragging us away in chains, and thought it was wrong. The men were just shoving us into the crate when a kindly man stopped them. He looked confused, and ordered the man to drop us. In Puja's captor's brief moment of surprise at the man, Puja managed to struggle free of his grip and run to the kindly man, who held her close and let her run to his truck. My captor however, the fat man who seemed to be the boss, was not having me taken too, so he tightened his grip on me and watched as the other hit me in the forehead and knocked me flat out as he shoved me in the crate...

The next thing I knew I was alone in the crate, but the truck was still stationary. Then, the kind man lifted me out of the crate, and laid me next to Puja in his van, where I began to faint... the last thing I saw before I blacked out was the two men, slumped unconscious on the dusty road.

I lived with the kind man for many years (his name was Vaikuntha, meaning 'saviour', which he certainly was), and eventually fell deeply in love with his son, Hakeem.' She nudged a dozing Jasmine who immediately jumped awake and whispered in her ear, 'that's your grandfather.' Jasmine's eyes swelled in wonder. 'He was called Hakeem? And my great-grandfather saved your life from those horrible kidnappers?' Nani nodded her head and held Jasmine close. 'Yes, but let me continue, my story is almost complete. Me and my beloved married, and had a child together, two actually!' Jasmine's mouth dropped open. 'Maa had a sibling?'

'Yes,' Nani replied, 'he is still alive, your uncle... but I'm not sure he wants you to see him, for he was... well, that's a story for another night.' She pinched Jasmine lightly on the cheek, and kissed her forehead. 'My Yuthika.' She spoke clearly now, her voice high and full of importance. 'I did not just tell you my past because of my ill fate, I need to teach you something. People... overlook us. Indians. People with darker skin. We... we matter. Our lives matter. You matter. And promise me, Yuthika, that you will never let anyone tell you otherwise.'

And Jasmine followed this, year after year and even after her Nani passed away, she never stopped believing in herself and in others, and whenever she felt sad or alone, her Nani's spirit would be there, to remind her she was important. Jasmine lived a long and happy life, and eventually passed the story of her Nani to her own grandchildren, and was at peace until the day she died.

STAND UP SONG

By Amelia Wrona, Year 7

I'll stand up
Oh all we need is confidence
All we need is confidence
Confidence

I'll stand up
Stand up with you
I'll stand up
Stand up with you
I'll stand up
Wherever you may be

I'll stand up strong with you by my side

Side by side
We can do anything
Side by side
We can be who we want to be
Side by side
We will be great
Once again (once again)

I'll stand up strong with you by my side

I'll stand by you
I'll stand by you
Together we can accomplish anything!
And you'll stand by me
And you'll stand by me
Together we can accomplish anything!

I'll stand up strong with you by my side

Once we get that power
Deep down in your heart

Inspiration and Diversity

Once we get that power
Deep down in your heart

Oh we will be great once again

I'll stand up
All we need is confidence
Confidence

I'll stand up
Stand up with you
I'll stand up
Stand up with you
I'll stand up
Wherever you may be

I'll stand up strong with you by my side

Side by side
We can do anything
Side by side
We can be who we want to be
Side by side
We will be great
Once again (once again)

I'll stand up strong with you by my side

I'll stand by you
I'll stand by you
Together we can accomplish anything!
And you'll stand by me
And you'll stand by me
Together we can accomplish anything!

I'll stand up strong with you by my side

Once we get that hope
Deep down in your heart

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Once we get that hope
Deep down in your heart

When we get that hope that we can be anything

We will be unstoppable!
We will be unstoppable!
Unstoppable!

We will be as mighty as the high waves
We will be as mighty as the high waves

I'll stand up
I'll stand up with you
I'll stand up with you
I'll stand up as strong as the waves
I'll stand up not turning back
I'll stand up with you by my side

We will be unstoppable together
We will stand strong together
We'll stand together
Always
Always
We will stand together
Always

A CHAMELEON'S PREY

By Klara Kucerova, Year 7

When I was born, black people were always second in everything. No matter how rich or poor you were, you were known as a disgrace to everyone if you were black. I was one of those people. I am not alive anymore, but every day I consider what I had done many years ago not only for coloured people but for everyone. Now let me tell you my story of how I made a change.

I was younger, around 22, still enjoying my youth and living my life. My friends had invited me to the nightclub, but when I got onto a bright yellow bus to get there everyone just became as silent as the middle of night and stared in disapproval. Halfway through my journey came an old, white lady around 60 years old so I offered her the bright red seat I was sitting on, just as every normal gentleman would. But instead, she went all the way to the back, offended, and stood there, so I sat back down.

I had finally arrived at the nightclub with my friends waiting for me outside. We were about to enter when a tall bodyguard walked up to me and dragged me all the way to the back of the building where all that surrounded me was cold air and darkness as pitch black as coal.

Chameleons are interesting animals that change colours to disguise themselves and hide from predators. As well as this, chameleons change colour to reflect their moods. For example, darker colours tend to mean a chameleon is angry. I am afraid to say a similar thing happens to white people. When they are angry, they turn bright red and when they are furious, they turn blue with their veins sticking out of their skin. However, the only difference is that white people don't change colour to adapt to their surroundings. That's what we coloured have to try all the time. Instead, they change colour so that they can attack others and I am afraid to say today it was me. 'Sir I am so sorry if there is anything bad I have done.' I have learnt one thing in life and that is to never get on a white person's bad side. 'If you want, sir, I can pay 5 bucks more just, please, let me go in.' I handed him 5 bucks from my leather purse, my hands trembling with fear. He spat on the ground and started shouting at me. 'As if I'd want to take anything from your filthy hands! Leave now before I call the cops!' From that moment on, I realised I was scared of white people. They blamed us for their problems even if we had done nothing wrong. 'But, sir, I didn't do anything wrong.' 'Did you just talk back to me?' I was scared to death but instead of me thinking about what I was doing, I spoke back to him again. 'I know I did that's why I have a mouth.' Oh no, what had I done now, I was gonna be in so much trouble.

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'That's why blacks like you shouldn't have a mouth because you always want to change things for your own sake! You greedy monsters!'

I ran away from him, I ran as fast as my feet could run. I have to say that unfortunately, it took me 2 whole years to realise what in that unfortunate scenario I had done wrong. I should have said I am not afraid of being black, actually, I am rather proud of it. I started protests. I found a bunch of friends who teamed up with me and we would walk daily all around town gathering more people with signs saying we are all equal. However, one day people had alerted the cops and told them how our protests had gotten dangerous. They made a wall of cops in front of us and said that if we didn't turn around and leave, they would have to shoot us. Many left and some stayed but when they shot into the air with their guns, everyone went apart from me. I stood there and did not move. I was petrified but ready to attack with words, not weapons. I started to chant: 'We are all equal! We are all equal!' The last thing I remember was an ear-piercing scream. Not any scream, but my scream. I had been shot. I woke up lying in my bed. People were standing around me, staring at me trying to see if I had woken up. I recognised many of them and they were all asking me if I was ok. I tried to get out of bed but realised I had lost one of my legs. Luckily, I was still alive. I somehow stood up and shouted: 'We are all equal!' But no one said anything. Instead, the room became as quiet as a graveyard. They wouldn't continue, would they? They were all afraid of losing their lives but I wasn't. If it took one life to save many others then that life would be mine. I waddled out of the bed and blocked out all of the shouts and pleas telling me to stay and that it wasn't worth it but I went on. I got onto the road and a cop saw me and walked up to me. 'Haven't you had enough already!' No, I hadn't had enough. I kept on walking up towards him. 'If you get any closer, I won't hold back!' Nothing would make me stop ever again. 'I need back up here, a black man is walking up to me and he seems dangerous!' He said into his dark green walkie-talkie. More cops came and started aiming their guns at me, then one of them spoke: 'Any last words?' I realised he was the one that had

shot me in the leg. 'Yes, actually I'd like to say...Stop this violence, blacks are humans too. They still have feelings and families! BLACK LIVES MATTER!!!'

A second later I got shot and died but I did complete what I had been made to do. Many people had seen what had happened and rumours spread of how a black man died just to help coloured humans. After that, people had begun to realise their mistakes and the status of blacks had improved, but some things remained unfair and now it is up to you to finish off the rest of my job for me.

BLACK LIVES MATTER!!!

MY NAME IS SELENE

By Alf Varghese, Year 7

Walking through the bustling streets of the neighbourhood, I spotted a little white girl. I walked up to her and asked if she wanted to be friends. She looked at me with a disgusted and horrified look. She screamed, and ran away. Trying to hold back my tears, I trudged home. Ate my supper miserably. As I laid on the cold hard mattress, I thought to myself: 'Will I ever have a friend?' People discard me and think of me as a monster. 'Bug Face.' That's what they call me. But why?

All the girls in my neighbourhood are different. I see them now. Why can I not be like them? I close my eyes and get myself to sleep.

In the morning, I woke up to a dazzling sun. I said my prayers and trudged downstairs. Cold milk with corn flakes for breakfast. My mum and I are poor. Ever since Father died. He never came home from work. I still remember that day vividly. It was getting late so Mum called his office to check if he was working late, but they said he had left hours ago. Mummy went into the car and that was all I could remember until I heard a loud scream. Mummy

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was crying. I knew that our lives would have never been the same again.

The following day, as I went outside for a walk, I was ambushed by a tsunami of water balloons. When the water cleared, I saw a group of girls gathering more ammo to shoot at me. I rushed back into the house and ran to my room and hid there until I knew they were gone. Once outside again, I noticed it. 'BUG FACE.' Big and bold. Right on our living room window. I just could not move. Why were they doing this to me? That's when I felt something hit me. They were shooting me. Ammos, but they were nonstop. Why? What made me different from them?

That was the day I realised why they were doing this to me. As I saw the march approaching, the girls fled the scene. The BLM march was advancing as they were retiring, scared and horrified at the same time. That's when it struck me. And that's when I joined in and grabbed a BLM flag. I waved it up high and lifted my head up. Black lives do matter. Shout it out loud.

BLACK LIVES MATTER!

BE LIKE HER

By Julia Szymanska, Year 7

She's so brave and bold, why can't I be like her? Kneeling down to show what she believes in, it's spectacular. All I do is sit at home and go to work. These people are heroes, real-life warriors. Every day I face discrimination, I get angry of course, but I never do anything about it. These people are fighting, doing what is right. In fact, tomorrow, I will protest too. I will let the whole world know what I face every day.

Now is the time, I will fight, I will be brave. I am so excited and yet so nervous. I know in my heart that it is the right thing to do, but will I be able to be as brave as the lion who hunts for his prey? I hope so.

There are so many people here, such a large community. I finally feel like part of something. The protesters start to chant, and so do I. 'Black lives Matter, Black lives Matter!'

It's such a warm feeling, to be part of something this big, I know I have made a difference, and it feels good.

BLACK

By Amelia Wrona, Year 7

I am black,
My skin blends into the night,
And I cannot help but cry,
I try to be noticed with all my might,

For black people,
We are treated like dirt,
But people don't listen,
For they don't know that it hurt,

I am proud to be black,
People think we should hide,
Because of being a different colour,
But instead it gives me pride,

Together we become one,
With all our colours becoming a beautiful sight,
And we don't listen to their words,
Because we stand up for what is right,

I stand out in the crowd,
I ignore what they say,
I stay strong,
I am Rose May.

BLM: THE PROTEST

By Matthew Meara, Year 8

I hear the shouting of the crowd. It's loud. I am at the back of the group, their riot shields blocking the view in front, but I can tell there were a lot of them. What are they protesting about? Why are we here?

An undistinguished chant. There are too many voices that sound like one scream of incomprehensible sounds. Why can't they settle quietly? I do not know. But we have orders. We keep it peaceful. And if the protesters didn't take it too far, maybe we wouldn't have to be forceful.

We block the entire street. Yells coming from the other side deafening us. Through the gaps, I see a woman kneeling in front of us. In front of the guards. They call it bravery. My father used to say that it is a fool's substitute for intelligence. Never understood why, but maybe I will soon.

It all escalated quickly: more and more people gathering, one shout echoed shortly by others, hands going up.

We have orders. And we will do it.

WHITE SUPREMACY AND OUR ENGLISH LITERATURE CURRICULUM

LEIGHANN MORRIS

‘We can become so enthralled with officialdom that it’s easy to forget that curricula are not the result of some universal abstract truth but rather the designs of actual human beings like you and me.’ (Akala, 2018)

Our current National Curriculum for English was tightly controlled by Conservative policy in 2014 and strongly promotes what *The Cox Report* (DES, 1989) defines as a ‘cultural heritage’ view of the purpose of English, emphasising ‘the responsibility of schools to lead children to an appreciation of those works of literature that have been widely regarded as amongst the finest in the language.’ (Davidson and Daly, 2014, p4) The report, which recorded and summarised five differing ‘views’ on the purpose of English teaching according to those in the profession, reveals a crucial dilemma: The English curriculum’s design is synonymous with fluctuating political power, subjectively mirroring the ideological agenda and virtues of those shaping educational policy.

Despite living in a multicultural Britain with former colonies in Africa and Asia, the ‘best of British’ literary heritage is racialised as white in our GCSE English literature curriculum (DfE, 2013) through an almost exclusively white authorship. There is not a single black author in the AQA English literature GCSE syllabus (AQA, 2014) and only two non-white authors – Meera Syal and Kazuo Ishiguro – a fact that attracts continued criticism from those highlighting the injustice, racism and absurdity of Britain’s GCSE students leaving school having never studied a book by a single black author (Sundorph, 2020; Nelson-Addy et al, 2020; Yandell, 2020; Iffath, 2020; Mohamud, 2020). In its total erasure of black authors and marginalisation of black experience, our

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current National Curriculum for English literature therefore works to structurally preserve and promote white British culture as both superior and the 'norm,' relaying a covertly racist idea central to white supremacy: White British is best.

White British ideas about white supremacy are often far removed from white British experience, associated instead with the theatrics and extremities of overtly racist groups such as the Klu Klux Klan. *Saad in Me and White Supremacy* (2020) challenged us on this, reminding us that white supremacy is an invisible system in which white is considered and preserved as best at the expense of those furthest away from it.

White supremacy racist ideology that is based upon the belief that white people are superior in many ways to people of other races and that therefore, white people should be dominant over other races. White supremacy is not just an attitude or a way of thinking. It also extends to how systems and institutions are structured to uphold this white dominance. (Saad, 2020, p12)

Saad explains that this system – in which proximity to whiteness is afforded what antiracist discourse terms 'privilege' (Saad, 2020, p15) – is also upheld in our institutions, such as our schools. White supremacy in English literature is therefore a value reflected in our English literature GCSE syllabus and upheld in the schools that teach it. This is not an idea hidden by our Conservative government, but rather openly celebrated. During the 2010 Conservative Party conference, the former Education Secretary Michael Gove laid out a prescriptive, limited and traditionalist idea about the purpose of studying English literature, along with a brazenly racist definition of what constitutes the best of the British literary canon, failing to include a single author of colour from Britain or any of its former colonies in our supposed 'Island Story':

'We need to reform English. The great tradition of our literature – Dryden, Pope, Swift, Byron, Keats, Shelley, Auste, Dickens and Hardy – should be at the heart of school life. Our literature is the best in the

world. It is every child's birthright and we should be proud to teach it in every school.' (Gove, 2010)

This assignment views this statement as directly at odds with the National Curriculum for English's aims to 'appreciate our rich and varied literary heritage' (DfE, 2014, p3) and agrees with critics (Sundorph, 2020; Nelson-Addy et al, 2020; Yandell, 2020; Iffath 2020) that the promotion of this limited version of British literary heritage not only erases black voices and perpetuates a 'single story' (Adichie, 2009) but importantly 'is epistemically violent because it has removed any explicit, critical discussions about racism and race' (Nelson-Addy et al, 2020, p35).

For organisations such as The Black Curriculum and NATE, this assignment is deeply concerned with the lack of diversity and representation in our English literature curriculum, and agrees that a more inclusive and decolonised English curriculum would 'reject the promotion of English heritage' altogether (Mohamud, 2020, p391). This is because the white British literary heritage championed in school perpetuates:

...a narrative that is reminiscent of the colonial era whereby other cultures are forcibly excluded from what it means to be English and construed as indisputably inferior. This discounts the fact that British society in the present day is multicultural – largely due to the legacy of colonialism – and that the pupils who encounter set texts in the classroom will be from diverse backgrounds. (Iffath, 2021, p370).

Since the seismic change needed to make a centralised shift away from a white Eurocentric 'cultural heritage' English curriculum is largely driven by ideology, as outlined in the opening to this assignment, this work instead reflects on critical pedagogy and other methods of teaching as antiracist tools, refraining from presenting ideas for a diversified version of our English literature syllabus. This is because, as Motha (2014) discusses in *Race, Empire and English Language Teaching*, 'liberal multiculturalism' is often no more than 'palliated differences which are tolerated insofar as they reinforce assimilation to the white... norm.' (Hurie, 2016, p465) Instead, like Motha (2014), this assignment advocates

for a 'critical multiculturalism that not only leads to awareness of injustice but also is an active stance to transform it.' (Hurie, 2016, p465)

Antiracism is defined as a process of unlearning as well as learning; of committing to actively recognise, challenge and dismantle visible (interpersonal) and more invisible (institutional and structural) forms of racism and privilege in order to redistribute power in all areas of society, as outlined in Saad's antiracism toolkit, *Me and White Supremacy* (Saad, 2020).

The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report (Macpherson, 1999) made clear recommendations for dismantling racism in its investigation of institutional racism following the racially motivated death of Stephen Lawrence and subsequent mishandling of the investigation by the police. Education was named as the primary vehicle for instigating societal changes in the attitudes and behaviours fuelling structural racism in Britain (Macpherson, 1999, 46.34), a finding and recommendation that has been 'utterly disregarded' in the design of our National Curriculum in the eyes of its critics (Yandell, 2020, p350). This assignment therefore seeks to harness the 'greater degree of freedom' given to teachers in the curriculum reform of 2010 (DfE, 2010, 4.9 p42) to use pedagogy as antiracist action in light of governmental failures to acknowledge or address institutional racism in Britain (Commission on Race and Ethnic and Ethnic Disparities, 2021).

I will focus specifically on the teaching of racially fraught literature in direct response to my classroom experience. Despite antiracism training having no place in my PGCE or school CPD (the closest being discussions around decolonising the curriculum and 'Black Lives Matter' appearing thematically, neither of which ask the white PGCE student to confront 'white privilege' or practice antiracist pedagogy), I have taught multiple literature texts featuring overtly racist narratives, language and issues with little guidance about how to tackle them thoroughly and meaningfully as a teacher in the classroom. This assignment is an attempt to fill those gaps; recognising that education in the classroom space can uphold but also dismantle power (Hooks,

2014; Freire 1996) through the methods researched and reflected on in this assignment.

The first of these texts was *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry*, a novel by black author Mildred D. Taylor, centred around a black family living through the injustices of the Jim Crow era, not listed on the GCSE syllabus but read alongside my first placement's 'Language and Power' unit with year eight. Secondly was *A Taste of Honey*, a 1959 play by white author Shelagh Delaney featured on the AQA English literature syllabus which tells the story of Jo, a young, white working-class girl who has an interracial relationship resulting in pregnancy, and lastly *Othello*, a 1601 play by Shakespeare listed on the AQA English literature syllabus and featuring a black protagonist. I will be teaching this play for the first time during the summer term with a year eight class.

A central message of the Black Lives Matter movement and its aim to dismantle white power is normalising the discomfort felt around conversations and confrontations about racism, abandoning the white preoccupation with 'getting it wrong' in order to make any progress at all towards becoming an antiracist society (Black Lives Matter, 2020). The movement reminds the white participants in these conversations of their duty and privilege to partake as opposed to enduring racism itself, echoing the sentiment of Martin Luther King's *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* (1963) pinpointing 'white moderate' inaction and silence as the biggest blockade to progress. This is something at the forefront of my mind in the classroom, along with Freire's conviction that 'education can only be liberatory when everyone claims knowledge as a field in which we all labour.' (as described by Hooks, 2014, p14) My classroom would not become a 'transgressive' or 'liberatory' space that moves beyond oppressive boundaries, as described by Hooks (2014) and Freire's (1996) critical pedagogy, without doing what Saad (2020) labels 'the work' myself.

Although other groups are marginalised in society and the curriculum that mirrors it, this assignment will focus specifically on those racialised as black in its discussion of racism, recognising

that those furthest away from whiteness are afforded the least societal privileges (Saad, 2020), reflected most visibly in the erasure of black authors along with the under representation, misrepresentation, or total erasure of black experience in English literature texts in the secondary classroom.

THEORY AND PRACTICE: ANTIRACIST APPROACHES TO THE TEACHING OF RACIALLY FRAUGHT LITERATURE

'The paradox of education is precisely this – that as one begins to become conscious, one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated.'
(James Baldwin, 1963)

In Mohamud's (2020) discussion of 'race' in the classroom, we learn of the author's frustration at a Eurocentric literary heritage model of the English curriculum where 'black people only seemed to feature as slaves' (Mohamud, 2020, p.384) and a novel's place in the established literary canon magically divorces it from its troubling content. Similarly, in my teaching experience thus far, black characters in novels we've read are poor, uneducated victims of horrific acts of violent racism (*Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry*); under-developed, reductive and sexualised – not even referred to by name most of the time (*A Taste of Honey*); and a murderer (*Othello*). As a teacher, I've questioned and reflected on the most valuable and antiracist approaches to teaching these texts that all feature a version of black trauma as their narrative focal points.

Representation is only a small part of the problem of white supremacy in English literature. Importantly for this assignment, Mohamud (2020) questions conversations about 'race' in the classroom, and the problems with dismissing racially charged dialogue about language and identity – a strong impulse for (especially white) teachers feeling unprepared or ill-equipped to manage difficult conversations about racism in a society only just beginning to normalise them. For a white teacher, this discomfort often comes from transitioning from a 'colourblind' (Bonila-Silva, 2013) viewpoint on 'race' to acknowledge difference and 'white

privilege' in themselves, society, and therefore the classroom – the latter a microcosm of the former. There is also the added pressure, demonstrated by Mohamud (2020), of delivering a prescriptive learning cycle and an anxiety felt from steering too far away from it.

When Mohamud (2020) heard two students discussing the meaning of *Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou, a black student named Charlie argued with his white classmate that 'not every poem by a black author is about slavery,' after the white student had attributed its meaning as so (Mohamud, 2020, p388). Instead of addressing the pertinent point made by her black student about black lives only being 'addressed in school when it is about slavery – only as victims' (Mohamud, 2020, p388), Mohamud shut the conversation down and changed the topic, unprepared for a complex and controversial discussion about racism and identity that Hooks (2014) would view as a 'revolutionary' moment of learning and 'meaningful' and 'radical' in its connection to the real lived experience of the student (Hooks, 2014, p19).

Reflecting on this moment and its impact, Mohamud (2020) regretfully viewed it as a missed opportunity for students to 'learn about ideas that transcend standardised literacy and restrictive PEE paragraphs, which deny the legitimacy of those cultural resources for language and learning, focusing instead on what it constructs as an individual's cognitive level' (Mohamud, 2020, p389). In short: conversations about racism are all too often dismissed in the classroom when too challenging or disruptive to the 'real' learning, but perhaps we're misunderstanding what the real learning is (or at the very least defining it too narrowly). For writers and teachers like Hooks (2014) who deeply oppose mainstream education's fixation with 'information only...no relation how one lives and behaves' (Hooks, 2014, p3), the real learning takes place when the 'dualistic separation of public and private' is abandoned (Hooks, 2013, p18) and the classroom becomes a place relevant to the world outside; connected to an 'antiracist struggle.' (Hooks, 2014, p3)

Creative Writing Gets Different

Similar to Hooks (2014), Mohamud (2020) reflects that if teachers can't address the lack of representation in the curriculum, then they can foster inclusion through the dialogue and discussion – informed by personal experience – that Mohamud's student Charlie was denied (Mohamud, 2020, p391). Mohamud suggests that an empowering and inclusive classroom space must employ what Vygotsky defined as a 'social constructivist' approach to teaching and learning, where students draw on funds of knowledge to construct meaning through social dialogue (Moll & Greenberg, 1990). In this frame of learning, the teacher is not the authority but the mediator. Returning to our subject, this is especially important considering my own identity as a white teacher, as 'racial identity influences teaching.' (Hurie, 2016, p465) To exercise authority on the subject of racism and dismiss or deny black experience would be an extension of white power, 'enacting a ritual of control about domination and unjust exercise of power' (Hooks, 2014, p.5), rather than confronting and dismantling it – contributing to what Freire (1996) labels an imbalance of power through authoritative dialogue.

During a *Roll Of Thunder* lesson, a mixed-race student put her hand up and asked: 'Can black people be racist to white people?' Although I didn't shut the question down completely, like Mohamud (2020), I was taken aback by this question and felt unprepared to answer it. My impulse was to move on quickly in case I got it wrong, the class reacted badly, or the lesson became disruptive. I answered that yes, it was possible, but that because it is most commonly the other way round, we usually associate the receivers of racism as black and the perpetrators as white. We moved on.

Although this is true on a basic level, having reflected on the importance of dialogue and individual experience that writers of critical pedagogy Hooks (2014) and antiracist teaching methods Mohamud (2020) discuss as the most meaningful and empowering methods to use in a 'transgressive' classroom, I would instead mediate a conversation about this with the class, creating a democratic space where students are encouraged to bring their own experiences forward (if comfortable) to construct meaning

and answer the question together, with clear rules to respect each other's' contributions.

This is because in pedagogy that breaks boundaries as opposed to reinforcing domination, each students' presence is valued as vital to the learning, as outlined in Hooks' definition of 'radical pedagogy.' (Hooks, 2014, p8) In addition, when addressing possible misconceptions during our discussion, I would change my language around the definition of racism from talking in terms of quantity to power. As a student teacher, I reflect on this moment as a missed opportunity for the inclusion and centring of black experience through dialogue and discussion mediated by the teacher, in a classroom in which it is usually marginalised.

Yandell's editorial for *Changing English* reinforces the idea that in the face of a curriculum in which black experience is erased, marginalised or misrepresented, pedagogy is considered vital to an antiracist and decolonised classroom:

'What matters much more are the pedagogic relations of the classroom, how students are positioned, and what space is provided for them to draw on the knowledge they have acquired and reflect on the experiences they have had beyond the school gates. It is, thus, in the enactment of the curriculum (Barnes 1976) that decolonisation becomes realisable.' (Yandell, 2020, p350).

Relating to this idea is Appendix A, a lesson designed and taught in my first school placement on chapter 3 of *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry* – the narrative climax of the novel which sees the young black characters get their own back on the white peers who take pleasure on their segregation. As discussed previously, this novel – not on the GCSE syllabus and selected by my placement school for year eight – is by a black author and is racially fraught in its subject, arguably a narrative of black trauma.

The objective of the lesson was to 'evaluate the difference between justice and revenge as a theme in the novel' and my placement school's resource to warn of 'offensive' language (the

Creative Writing Gets Different

n-word) appearing in the chapter. I considered that labelling racist language 'offensive' rather than 'racist' was avoiding tackling the language and its meaning directly, watering it down to a more palatable version at the disservice to those who had experienced it. For this reason, I changed the lesson to explicitly state 'racist' language.

To critically understand the motivations and purpose of racist language, rather than just accept that racist language is in the book and move on, we started the lesson with a discussion: What is racist language?; Why do people use it?; Who is likely to use it?; During this discussion, how can we support our classmates who can relate to this, who may have seen or experienced racist language being used?; and why would Mildred D. Taylor include the n-word in the novel? Here, the class told myself and their classmates that racist language is a tool for oppressing others, and connected this to maintaining power through a previous lesson on structural racism. The class also understood that the word was used by a black author, who had experienced racism, to critique this racist society – different from Steinbeck, a white author who had used the n-word in *Of Mice and Men*. In our introductory discussion, we therefore used dialogue to approach the text and its language from what *The Cox Report* (1989) terms a 'cultural analysis' viewpoint, acknowledging society's power structures and understanding meaning through the identity of the author.

We then discussed the difference between justice and revenge, making word clouds, and using active speaking skills to determine whether the actions of the characters in the novels were justice or revenge. To make links with similar antiracist struggles today, therefore connecting students to the characters and making the learning relevant for lived experience, we watched a video of the recent toppling of Bristol's Edward Colston statue. I wanted students to decide, now that justice and revenge was defined, if justice was a privilege only afforded to some. After determining who Edward Colston was and watching the video, we discussed: How did you feel when you saw this? How does it compare to how you felt about the Logan children and the bus? Do you think

this is an example of justice, revenge, or both? The overwhelming response was that students felt angry about the statue, happy it was destroyed, and felt it should have been removed sooner. They understood that receiving justice relied on institutions often upheld by the legacy of white power. Taking action into their own hands in the form of revenge was the only option for the characters in the novel and the topplers of the statue, who had been let down by institutions such as the police, schools, and local councils.

The success in this lesson was in the participation of one student, who for most of the part refused to engage. The student was keen to share her thoughts on the statue and actively participated in the discussion on justice and revenge, telling myself and her peers that she 'had to resort to revenge most of the time.' Having never participated before, she then asked to read a part in the book for the rest of the lesson. Reflecting on Hooks (2014), this could be because 'as a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, and in recognising one another's presence.' (Hooks, 2014, p8) This was likely one of the few times in English literature that her true lived experience would be a focal point, centred and valued in this way; key to establishing meaning for herself and others.

A year 9 lesson featuring racism and racist language in act two of *A Taste of Honey* at my second placement provides a further opportunity to reflect on antiracist pedagogy in the teaching of racially fraught literature (see Appendix B). Taught online during lockdown at the start of my placement, I co-taught with the teacher, assigned the slides on stage directions with the teacher taking part of the script featuring racist language and attitudes. The character of Jo's boyfriend, Jimmy, (referred to as 'boy' and described as 'coloured' by the writer) is little beyond an 'issue' character (Chetty, 2016, p98); briefly appearing as a sexualised stereotype of the absent black father, causing destruction to the lives of the other white characters. In act two, a conversation between Jo and Jimmy reveals Jo's racist attitude towards Jimmy.

Creative Writing Gets Different

The lesson started with the note ‘nowadays, we do not use the word ‘coloured’ to describe Black people,’ warning the students of the racist content coming up. Jo then proceeds to ask Jimmy: ‘What’s that? Mau Mau? Did your ancestors come from Africa? There’s still a bit of jungle in you somewhere,’ before promising Jimmy that she doesn’t care what others think.

Although it was made clear that Delaney was likely critiquing Jo’s racism and reflecting racist attitudes of 1950’s Britain, it’s worth reflecting that we were explaining and excusing the racism in the play from a white perspective, failing to interrogate it critically due to its established place in the syllabus. With students reading aloud from home, I wondered how students racialised as black, along with their parents, felt hearing this read aloud. It is worth reflecting on similar reflective questions asked by Iffath (2020) after a student protested about the derogatory use of ‘street Arabs’ in *The Sign of The Four* by Sherlock Holmes:

CHRISTIAN: ‘But that’s racist! That’s like saying all Arabs are dirty.’

ME: ‘Yes, well, British society was very racist.’

CHRISTIAN: ‘How come we’re even reading this book, man?’ (Iffath, 2020, p374). Iffath reflected the text’s racism here:

‘...disrupts his assumed position as an objective reader; his experience of living as a person of colour in a racialised society means he identifies more with the Arabs the text is referring to derogatorily than the expected readerly position that does not object to this derogatory reference.’ (Iffath, 2020, p374)

In the same way, I felt that we had assumed the position of ‘objective reader’ on the students, failing to acknowledge their identities and experiences in the teaching of the text, marred further by a lack of opportunity to create a democratic classroom online (there was very little spoken engagement in the lessons). Therefore, students were ‘positioned as passive receivers of the cultural capital that is invested in canonical literature; their role

merely to learn to appreciate works whose value has already been established.’ (Iffath, 2020, p350).

In addition to discussing antiracist methods for approaching conversations with students about identity and racism during lessons on racially fraught literature, this assignment also seeks to understand meaningful ways to use racially fraught literature as a means of facilitating learning about structural racism.

In *Natives* (2018), Akala highlights society’s failure, specifically in mainstream education, to examine structural racism, preoccupied instead with more visible forms of racism and vilifying those displaying them whilst failing to view the latter as a byproduct of the former and the former as a much more menacing force:

‘Where we do discuss race in public, we have been trained to see racism – if we see it at all – as an issue of interpersonal morality. Good people are not racist, only bad people are. This neat binary is a great way of avoiding any real discussion at all. But without the structural violence of unequal treatment before the law and in education, and a history of racial exploitation by states, simple acts of personal prejudice would have significantly less meaning.’ (Akala, 2018, p11)

When teaching *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry*, I saw an opportunity for students to develop a three-dimensional understanding of racism that Akala (2018) discusses as missing from the mainstream British conscience, enabling structural racism to remain unchallenged. Appendix C is an introductory lesson to *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry*, the objective of which was to understand the social, historical and cultural background of the novel, focusing on racism and poverty in 1930’s Mississippi. I included a slide (slide 3) outlining the four levels of racism: Personal, interpersonal, institutional, and structural, because I wanted students to understand the structural links between racism and poverty, specifically through the practice of sharecropping that features so heavily in the book’s narrative.

Creative Writing Gets Different

Importantly, I wanted to give students opportunities to draw links with today's society and their own lives, understanding that although visible forms of racism might operate differently today – we do not see lynching, for example – that the invisible structures that uphold white privilege and supremacy remain unchanged. We navigated this through paired and class discussion of examples of the types of racism that could appear in each of the categories today, such as police brutality, stop and search, and a lack of people of colour in leadership positions, with students encouraged (if comfortable) to bring their own experiences or observations into the classroom in order to construct meaning. The student discussed earlier, whose participation grew over the Roll of Thunder lessons, shared the example of her mum's upcoming deportation as an example of racism, citing the attitude of Britain as 'you don't belong here.'

Here the classroom became what Hooks (2014, p.8) has termed a 'collective effort' and a 'learning community.' Students also 'paired and shared' questions such as: Slavery ends in 1865. How are black citizens oppressed in the 1930s, even when freed? Are American black citizens really free?; How are racism and poverty linked? And how is sharecropping an example of structural racism? The discussions were successful in terms of engagement and recall, with students able to define four different types of racism and understand the similarities and differences in how they operate in 1930's Mississippi and Britain today.

The feedback provided from the teacher recommended removing the slide on different forms of racism, as it was too detailed for year eight. Although I reflected that perhaps I'd tried to tackle too much in one lesson, I was successful in creating a 'transgressive' classroom where students were active participants rather than passive consumers of their education (Hooks, 2014, p6), and where learning had transcended 'compartmentalized knowledge' to relate to how students and the world outside 'lived and behaved.' (Hooks, 2014, p3)

REFLECTIONS ON ANTIRACIST APPROACHES TO THE TEACHING OF RACIALLY FRAUGHT LITERATURE

This assignment has outlined that critical pedagogy as an antiracist teaching practice can provide an antidote to our Eurocentric English literature curriculum, upheld by white supremacy through its 'cultural heritage' values.

Using racially fraught literature as its subject and point for reflection, this assignment has demonstrated that for education to be the 'practice of freedom,' 'transgressing' boundaries, challenging oppression, and connected to antiracist struggle (Hooks, 2014), the relationship between the teacher and the student must evolve from authoritarian to democratic in order to create a 'learning community' where 'contributions are used as resources.' (Hooks, 2014, p8) Traditional behaviourist methods of teaching, which 'reinforce domination,' (Hooks, 2014, p4) are therefore not suitable for the antiracist teaching. Instead, social constructivist methods of dialogue and discussion enable students to construct meaning collectively in relation to lived experience.

This assignment has also outlined the need to thoroughly acknowledge society's racial difference and privilege in the classroom, a challenging but critical part of meaningful antiracist teaching and learning that presents itself in the teaching of racially fraught English literature. Therefore, this assignment views antiracist English teaching from what *The Cox Report* (1989) defined as a 'personal growth' and 'cultural analysis' perspective, emphasising critical understanding and intellectual and spiritual growth as desirable outcomes for students. This is because to educate as the practice of freedom is to 'believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students.' (Hooks, 2014, p14)

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LEARNING THROUGH CREATIVE WRITING

STORYTELLING AND EXPRESSIVE WRITING IN CREATIVE WRITING MEGAN ABLES

INTRODUCTION

In my time teaching at primary schools in south-east London, I have found that when it comes to creative writing in the classroom that children lack a creative spark and are more focused on their spelling and trying to use adventurous vocabulary rather than creating their own work that they are proud of that is expressive. I believe that due to the objectives set by the government, planning and outcomes in class don't reflect the children's true creative writing abilities and are limiting what they can do.

Within the classroom, there is a focus on writing to achieve preconceived notions of what makes writing good, whereas there is little focus on the creative side of writing. Children are encouraged to focus on spelling, punctuation and grammar rather than developing important skills such as reflective and expressive writing and writing for fun. In the national curriculum for England, it says for Lower Key Stage Two,

Teachers should therefore be consolidating pupils' writing skills, their vocabulary, their grasp of sentence structure and their knowledge of linguistic terminology. (Department for Education, 2014)

This can cause children, especially children who have an additional need, to feel alienated from writing as if their punctuation isn't perfect, or they have used more simple than complex sentences, marking against the guidelines set will mean their work is deemed wrong, even if it is a creative piece that has an impact.

Accusations of laziness, poor motivation, and a reprehensible attitude are often directed toward

deficit writers. The results can be a serious loss of incentive, a generalized academic disenchantment and demoralization. Levine (1998, cited in Richards N.D).

THEORY

One way we can combat the alienation of children from creative writing is by promoting expressive writing and other forms of writing in the classroom to help the children process their ideas and connect thoughts. This will also allow the lessons to be more inclusive of children with Specific Learning Disorders as they can find punctuation and spelling difficult which means they have lower levels for writing. One of the symptoms in The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (**DSM**) of Specific Learning Disorders is:

Other specific skills that may be impacted include the ability to put thoughts into written words, spelling, reading comprehension (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

Expressive writing '*is personal and emotional writing without regard to form or other writing conventions, like spelling, punctuation, and verb agreement.*' (Evans, 2012). As this form of writing does not focus on punctuation, spelling and verb agreement this means that the writing activity is more accessible as children of all levels can take part without being deemed as doing it 'wrong'. Expressive writing is also highly regarded as a very therapeutic process that helps the writer work through emotions they may not have even realised they were experiencing. One of the most recognised studies using expressive writing saw one out of four groups of university students write about their trauma and difficult emotions for a short period daily (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986). Since then there has been research on how to use expressive writing in the classroom such as Foulk and Hoover (1996) and in particular how to teach expressive writing to improve the writing in children with specific learning disorders (Baker, Gersten and Graham, 2003).

As well as expressive writing being beneficial for teaching without '*regard to form or other writing conventions*' (Evans, 2012) which

Creative Writing Gets Different

allows for the discovery of style, voice and inspiration, studies have also found participants using expressive writing as rating *'their writing as significantly more personal, meaningful and emotional'* (Baikie & Wilhelm 2005). Expressive writing could be seen as a form of bibliotherapy or used alongside it, which is defined as *"a creative arts therapies modality that involves storytelling or the reading of specific texts with the purpose of healing"* (Wikipedia Contributors, 2019).

I used expressive writing to begin writing about my own experiences of being a disabled teacher and how my disabilities have affected me in day-to-day life. I wrote a small amount every day to help me process my feelings whilst paying little attention to punctuation and grammar; my sole purpose is to get the emotions out in those short sessions. After I had completed four sessions of expressive writing, I began to rewrite the thoughts and feelings into an extended piece of prose to present to a small group of mixed-ability children in my class who had a negative attitude towards writing extended pieces. I also used it as a form of Bibliotherapy as within my classroom there are a range of disabilities and:

Bibliotherapy has proven to be a useful strategy for addressing the needs of students with disabilities in addition to helping those without disabilities to understand the lives of children with special needs. (Kurtts and Gavigan, 2008)

By using my own experiences, I was able to create an extended piece from my expressive writing sessions outcomes. Looking at the writing after was difficult at first as all the raw emotions were there unedited or filtered down and many of them were negative. This mirrored the fact that, although in the long run expressive writing sessions have been noted to improve mental health which impacted physical health, it did bring my mood down directly after writing which mirrored previous study findings (Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005). This suggested that when considering using expressive writing in the classroom the teacher needs to take into account who is taking part in the activity and if they are in a

safe environment where they can cope with the short-term distress.

With there being 14.9% of pupils in schools in the UK (Department for Education, 2019), I decided to use expressive writing to create a piece that would use storytelling to help educate my target group on special needs. In this piece, I wanted to show that it's not just the children that have different abilities, but that adults have them too and that it is fine. My goal with this was to help my children become more understanding of what their classmates and teacher experience on an everyday basis. This was an opportunity to expose the children to a text that had characters both old and young with needs to show that it is something that does not discriminate and affects people of all ages.

Storytelling is a method of teaching that is surrounded by debate on its place in the classroom. In a study on using storytelling to develop story writing skills in middle school children, it was found that '93.4% found the strategy useful and 92% liked this strategy' with the teachers as well as the students saying they found the strategy beneficial to the learning (Alkaaf, 2017). Storytelling is useful for developing children's writing skills as,

listeners encounter both familiar and new language patterns through story. They learn new words or new contexts for already familiar words. (National Council of Teachers of English, 1992).

This allows the listeners, which in the case of a classroom is usually the children, to develop new language skills which can then be applied to their storytelling both orally and written.

By using my piece to tell a story to the focus children about disability, I am both passing on information from person to person (Mcdrury & Alterio, 2003) and developing children's literacy skills (Satriani, 2019).

STUDY

The Participants

I selected a group of five Year 3 children consisting of both boys and girls who had a range of writing levels, with three working at year 2's expected standards, one at developing for their age group and one at secure. One of the below children was currently being referred for a Dyslexia screening. Their levels were assessed and moderated using the Southwark Tracking and Assessment Resource which can be found on the Southwark website. (Southwark Council, N.D)

Study

In the target group, I first presented them with the final prose without saying that I had written it and asked for their instant reactions to the piece.

Child 1: Miss Johnson is a superhero! She helped Jennifer which made her great.

Child 2: Why did Miss Johnson need to sit down? Are her legs okay?

Child 3: [child 2's name] you can't say that!

The children then began a debate on whether they were allowed to ask if they can comment asking why the character Miss Johnson needed to sit down and began to mention family members of their own who experienced difficulties in their lives, such as using walking sticks. At this point, I brought their attention back to me and discussed how the piece was written by me after spending just 15 minutes a day writing over a few days and using that to shape a final written piece. I orally told them the story of how I struggled when I first tried expressive writing and how it took me practice but eventually practice made perfect. I did this as a form of storytelling to encourage vocabulary I wanted them to use when reflecting on their work.

I then provided each of them with a copy of the extended piece and asked them to read it alone now rather than me reading the story to them, after which I got them to discuss with one another what they felt they learned from the writing and what they think

could be improved. We then discussed in a group what made them enjoy the writing and what they didn't.

After they had analysed this extended piece of prose, I carefully selected one of the days of expressive writing and shared that with the children. My next task for them was to compare the two pieces, what could they see that was similar and what differences could they spot. The first thing a child fed back to me was that in the expressive writing piece I had "missed most of my punctuation and made lots of spelling mistakes." I asked them if that meant I had done my writing wrong, which as a group they agreed I had. This became the teaching moment for the style of expressive writing and that just because my planning style of writing was different to what we were used to seeing in class, it didn't mean it was wrong as it was part of a process. I proceeded to explain 'Expressive writing is not creative writing; it is the thought process made visible (Foulk & Hoover, 1996).

With the children having a better understanding of what expressive writing was I set them the task of 10 minutes of expressive writing with the prompt of their experience of disability in their own lives, either with someone they know or themselves. I explained that we would do this for 3 days, writing once a day on this prompt and similar ready to write an extended piece at the end of the week with this as Foulk and Hoover (1996) stated 'Expressive Writing is making connections between the known and the new on paper.

FINDINGS

For the first two sessions, the children struggled with expressive writing and I found their moods to be low. I asked if they were still happy to continue and they confirmed that they were. At the end of the four expressive writing sessions, the children stated that they were enjoying the freedom of writing and that they wished there were more sessions on it. I explained that now we had to move on to writing our extended piece on the topic of disability using their expressive writing as a stimulus.

Creative Writing Gets Different

When I spoke to the children about how they progressed in their moods with the expressive writing around the topic of disability they told me how they found it difficult at first, but by the end the feelings weren't just negative. The child who is assessed as the strongest writer said that the activity, although it started with just sad and angry emotions, helped them to understand the world more as they connected what they already knew with their thoughts and feelings. This mirrored the belief that expressive writing means making connections between the known and the new on paper (Foulk & Hoover, 1996).

These children who were usually reluctant to write had now produced four days of independent expressive writing as well as using two days to write an extended piece of prose on disability. The children reported at the end of the week that they had enjoyed these sessions and being able to use expressive writing as they felt comfortable writing more knowing their spelling, grammar and punctuation wasn't the purpose for the writing as expressive writing is writing without form (Evans, 2012).

I believe integrating storytelling into the week with the telling of my own written story and my storytelling of my experience with expressive writing made the learning more accessible for the children. When I asked if doing this helped them, the children agreed which supports previous research on storytelling as a form of teaching (Alkaaf, 2017).

Overall, the children enjoyed the combination of expressive writing as inspiration for storytelling as it meant they were able to add more emotion and meaning to their final piece of work. I found that the use of my storytelling and allowing them to explore vocabulary in their expressive pieces resulted in them using more emotive language in their extended writing and putting more effort into their work.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, using expressive writing and story-telling pedagogies has a positive effect on children in the classroom and impacts their writing skills. Through expressive writing and story-

telling people can create meaningful writing (Baikie & Wilhelm 2005) that can be used to both teach writing skills on top of passing on information (Mcdrury & Alterio, 2003).

Using Pennebakers' structure (1986) from the study that many deem as the beginning of expressive writing activities as we know them in the classroom proved to be a useful tool in getting my focus group to develop their use of emotive language and allowed for them to write with no strict marking scheme. This led to the children feeling more comfortable and excited about writing which in turn helped them produce stronger writing in their extended piece at the end of the study. It is important to keep in mind that doing this activity can bring up negative emotions that can temporarily cause distress in the children before the long-term benefits of the improved mental and physical health occur (Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005).

This activity partnered with using story-telling as a form of teaching created a positive impact on all five children's writing, including the child with suspected Specific Learning Difficulties writing a coherent and impactful final piece which is why I will be using these methods as I continue with my career in teaching.

CREATIVE WRITING COMPONENT

'See, this is why I love literacy. If you can support your answer and it's not hateful then that means it can be correct,' she said as she leant on one of the tables that were empty due to the child being off sick. It was a bad pain day and being stood up for this long was draining Rosalie's energy. On these days where even getting out of bed hurt, standing in front of 30 children for six hours felt nearly impossible and all she wanted to do was sit in her chair by her computer. Often Rosalie wondered to herself if giving verbal input from her desk rather than the front of the room actually affected her classes learning, or if she had just been brainwashed into believing there was only one effective teaching style.

A small hand went up, snapping her away from her thoughts. 'Miss Johnson, is that true?'

Creative Writing Gets Different

‘Yes, Nicole! As long as you remember to use PEE, you can justify the answer and it’s correct!’ Rosalie responded with a smile.

The whole class let out a laugh at their teacher saying to use PEE. They were seven years old, pee was still very much a funny word to them, and hearing an adult say it made it even funnier.

‘Yes, yes I know I said PEE, calm down,’ she waited for the noise to die down slightly, ‘Who can remember what it stands for?’

The child at the back of the class looked as if they were going to raise their hand, but put it back down. Jennifer was a sweet child, she kept to herself mostly and rarely shared her ideas in class. Whenever Rosalie marked her books, she could see Jennifer knew all the answers, so it made her wonder why she never put her hand up to share. She had tried slowly to coax the child out of her shell, but nothing seemed to work.

Rosalie felt bad for Jennifer and wished she could make her see that if she did get diagnosed with autism that it wasn’t anything bad. The teacher had done an English degree, so she spent a lot of time looking at parts of words and she hated the term disability. The prefix dis tends to mean apart or away, and this implied that people with a diagnosis were away from being able, whereas they are just differently-abled. This pre-judgement the word gave people was something Miss Johnson experienced personally and hated the idea of her disability labelling her as weak or unable.

‘Miss I can tell you!’ called out Francesca. Francesca was smart too, but she knew it and had to let all the other children know. It always made Rosalie smile at how although Jennifer and Francesca were the same on paper from their academic achievements and effort levels in reports, they could not be more different in person. Yet another problem with how children are assessed was a thought that often came to Rosalie.

‘Now, Francesca, you know I can’t pick you because you called out and that doesn’t follow our classroom rules.’ A smile would stop Francesca from getting angry at not being picked.

‘Robin, would you like to answer?’

‘PEE stands for point, evidence, explain, Miss!’ Robin’s cheerful voice filled the room.

‘Fantastic, thank you so much, Robin. Now you all have ten minutes to answer as many questions as you can before break time. Remember, we write the LONG date in literacy, write your learning objective and make sure your questions are answered in full sentences. I should be able to know what the question is just by reading your answer.’

Rosalie finished up marking the children’s RE work from the day before as the rows of faces repeated like buildings focussed on their work; as she looked up some of them were staring into the distance and some she could see starting to distract and talk to one another. They had worked hard that morning so Miss Johnson didn’t mind some talking.

They were a good class who always tried their best, of course, there were some pickles in the classroom, there always was, but overall Rosalie had so much love for her class. As someone who had no children of her own, she saw every smiling face in that room as one of her own babies. They always made her smile, even on the worst pain days that had her crying during break times and lunches the children always made the struggle worth it.

The rest of the day passed by the same as most others; the children completed their work except for the usual couple who liked to try and get out of their work with many excuses and distractions. Jennifer completed all her work with little interaction with her peers, if it wasn’t for the few times she’d asked to go to the toilet or drink some water Rosalie wondered if she’d ever hear the child talk. It was a shame really, the girls writing was always full of life and the teacher was sure if she could just get the child to open up they would have amazing conversations and debates about the lessons.

As she marked with her partner teacher at the end of the day, Rosalie was thankful to finally be able to sit down for more than 30 seconds. Normally she hated taking her medication in front of

Creative Writing Gets Different

people, but sometimes she just had to; working a job that expectations required you to be on your feet all day meant the young teacher powered through so much pain. A small price to pay for a job she loved, although it did mean her weekends were usually spent bedridden.

As the natural lighting of her classroom faded from bright sun to a tangerine glow, Miss Johnson accepted her day was done. Although she hadn't finished marking her maths books yet, literacy was finished and she liked to head home before it was too dark in case her legs gave way on the journey. Once she had collapsed with only the glow of the streetlights to alert people to where she had fallen and it had been a while before somebody had been able to help lift her. For weeks she had felt embarrassed as the bruises on her ego took longer than the marks on her body to heal. Since that day she had vowed to leave work and get home before it got too dark so she would never end up in that situation.

'Night Charlotte, I'll see you tomorrow,' Rosalie waved to her partner teacher as she left.

'Night Rosalie, see you in the morning,' was her reply.

The cool air filled with children's laughter from the local park hit Rosalie straight in the face as she left her school. Many children often got picked up by one child's parent and then they would go to the park and then walk home alone as most of them lived locally. It was a very loving community around her work, and it filled her with joy to know how much the local families looked out for one another. With her headphones on, she began the journey home, the sounds of her emo throwback playlist helped motivate her to walk through the pain. It was one of those days where Rosalie had missed the bus home and if she did the 20-minute wait for the bus and then walking home from the bus stop it would take twice as long to get home; so, walking was her best option to get home before it was dark.

Buildings stretched on in the distance with the golden hue of the setting sun making them look a lot better than they usually looked

during the day. Brick stretched on for miles, built up all around everywhere Rosalie looked. Although there was some greenery from parks, it was mainly roads and estates around her work. Growing up in the countryside meant this still shocked Rosalie, even if she had worked in London for a few years by this point. She was used to empty roads and mainly surrounded by grass, be it forests, or parks, or playing fields. Roads where you rarely had to even look to cross because there were so few cars; you had more chance of being hit by a horse!

The young teacher looked up from her phone as she was changing her music and saw the familiar red of her schools uniform up approaching the traffic lights ahead. It was always weird when Rosalie saw the children outside of school. One part of it was the children always seemed so shocked to see her, sometimes she swore they thought she lived at school. Another part was she always worried if it would look strange a grown woman talking to children coming down the road; people jump to conclusions and she always feared she'd end up photographed and put on some local page with the caption 'WOMAN SEEN APPROACHING CHILDREN. KEEP AN EYE OUT.' It's not like she could just shout at everyone that she was a teacher and that these were the children she taught, not random children she was approaching.

As the child reached the traffic lights, their head turned to check the traffic and Rosalie saw the familiar face of Jennifer. The child's long, dark hair flowed down her back and swung from side to side as she checked she could see no cars were coming. While the teacher slowly walked down towards the lights, she wondered why Rosalie was walking alone. At home time she had been collected by the mother of another girl in the class as agreed upon by Jennifer's mum, so Rosalie had assumed that she was taking her home. Although most kids could walk home alone, Jennifer was a bit different with her needs.

Lost in thought, Rosalie almost missed Jennifer stepping out into the road whilst the lights were still green. It's a worn-out cliché, but time did slow down for her at that moment. It was one of

those electric cars that somehow were so quiet you didn't even notice they were there unless you saw them- and Jennifer hadn't seen it. The only thought crossing Rosalie's mind was she had to reach Jennifer. Now.

Without even pausing to debate just trying to call out to the child, she took off in a sprint. The excruciating pain jolting through her joints was nothing compared to the worry that one of her class could get seriously injured. Her children were her babies, and that was the only thing that mattered at that moment to Rosalie. Jennifer had frozen when she finally saw the car coming, which meant although she was stuck in the road, she was closer for Rosalie to grab on to and pull out of the way.

With one hand on the child's hood, Rosalie yanked her out of the road as the car swerved around. Both fell to the floor, breathing heavily and in shock at what had just happened.

'Miss Johnson?' Jennifer panted.

'Oh my God, Jennifer. Are you ok?' The teacher pulled the child and herself up, adrenaline coursing through her veins.

The frightened girl just looked around, shocked at what had just happened and taking in the sight of her teacher who was beginning to clearly show signs of how much pain she was in.

'Why didn't you push the button and wait for the lights to change?' Rosalie asked, limping to a nearby bench. 'Sorry. I need to sit.'

'I didn't think you had to.'

'Really? What do you normally do when you walk home?'

'I don't normally walk home alone. Francesca was mean so I wanted to go home.' she explained plainly, sitting down next to her teacher.

'You shouldn't have just walked off by yourself, could you not have gotten Francesca's mum to call your mum to come and get you?'

'Because I wanted to go home and I thought I could do it alone fine like everybody else can. I guess not.' The young girl sounded sad.

Rosalie sighed and looked down at her hands, she knew this would be hard to explain to Jennifer, but she had to tell her about how sometimes we all need help with different things, and it's okay to ask for it.

'Jennifer. Sometimes different people find different things difficult and that's okay. What's not ok is you almost getting hurt.' She began.

'I don't know why I messed up. What's wrong with me?' Jennifer spoke softly.

'There's nothing wrong with you. At all. Please, don't ever think that. Sure, you found this hard, but there's a secret life lesson that will make everything easier.' Rosalie leant in closer, 'It's ok to ask for help. Always. Even if you think it's something silly.' The hypocrisy in her words hurt her as she reflected on how little she asked for help. Every day in the classroom she would stand through the pain and make herself feel worse because she didn't want to admit she needed help, yet here she was telling Jennifer that she should ask for it.

'Really, Miss? And people won't laugh at me? Or think I'm stupid?' she asked.

'Not at all. In fact, it shows how smart you are because knowing when you need help and support is really hard sometimes. Even I still struggle sometimes, but I am learning. Hey, maybe we can practise together in school? If you're struggling in class you tell me, and if I'm struggling with something I tell you.' Rosalie suggested. She'd never even spoken to Jennifer this much before and she was impressed with how the girl was opening up and hoped it would carry on in the future.

'Deal,' Jennifer raised her hand and pinky finger to her teacher, a promise between two girls learning to ask for and accept help.

Rosalie took her pinky in her own, 'There's just one more thing I need you to do. Wait with me whilst I call the school office to get your mum to come and get you, the adrenalin will be wearing off soon and you'll need someone to take you home.'

'Ok, Miss. Thank you.' She smiled at her teacher.

Sitting at her desk Miss Johnson reflected on the events from the evening before. Eventually, the girls' mother had come and

collected her, and Rosalie called a taxi home, she was taking her own advice on asking for help and accepted she was in no state to walk home. As the children got on with their work whilst their teacher sat, the quiet girl walked over with her book.

‘Thank you for yesterday, Miss. Please can you help me with the extension?’ Jennifer spoke softly. Her eyes were fixed on the floor, but it was a start.

‘Of course. I can, but you need to stay here at my desk with me as I need to sit for a bit.’ They exchanged a knowing smile. Yes, Rosalie was the class teacher, but they had both taught each other that evening. Asking for help is a sign of strength, not a sign of weakness.

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SOCIAL JUSTICE AND VISIONARY FICTION ELLA ASHERI

HOW WILL READING AND REFLECTING ON VISIONARY FICTION WRITTEN BY ACTIVISTS AFFECT MY OWN SOCIAL JUSTICE PRAXIS?

Whenever we try to envision a world without war, without violence, without prisons, without capitalism, we are engaging in an exercise of speculative fiction. (Walidah Imarisha, 2015, p. 10)

The role of the artist is to make the revolution irresistible. (Toni Cade Bambara, qtd. in Olufemi, 2020, p. 89)

INTRODUCTION

I am at the early stages of a life-long process of developing my social justice praxis. I define my social justice praxis as an evolving relationship with the world and its structures, and a continuing practice of reflection and action towards justice and transformation. Here I take inspiration from critical pedagogue Paulo Freire who defines praxis as 'reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed' (Freire, 2018, p. 126). My orientation towards social justice was first cultivated when I began learning about and resisting the institutional racism of the university during my undergraduate degree. Six years later and educational justice, including feminist and anti-racist pedagogy, is still my primary focus in my activism and studies. More recently, I have been learning about abolition feminism, transformative justice and the interconnectedness of structures of inequality, for instance how the education system, the prison-industrial-complex, white supremacy, capitalism and patriarchy are all

interdependent (Davis, 2003; Olufemi, 2020; Lorde, 2019; Harney and Moten, 2013). Abolition feminism seeks to tear down these structures in order to reimagine and build new ones based on care, community and justice. I find this to be a hopeful and exciting project, particularly as it requires creativity and imagination.

Recently, I have found one of the most powerful methods in developing my social justice praxis to be reading speculative fiction. Books such as *Woman on the Edge of Time* (Piercy, 1976) have transformed the horizons of my imagination of the kind of future that is possible, beyond the limits of capitalism and gender as we know it today. It is for this reason that I have decided to do a small-scale autoethnographic research study to see how reading 'visionary fiction' written by activists would impact my ideas and feelings around social justice and broaden the horizons of my own imagination. I did this by reading 7 short stories from the collection *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements* (marea brown and Imarisha, 2015) and freewriting my reflections, and I will be analysing them thematically to explore how they have affected my ideas and feelings around social justice.

This project is deeply personal as it is part of my ongoing process of finding my place within the world of social justice organising and thinking. It is helping me consider my contributions towards social change: where, when and how I want to place my energies, and which skills, knowledges and resources I want to cultivate in order to be part of a movement for justice. However, this project also goes beyond the personal as it explores wider questions about the importance of art and literature within social change. It asks how we can affect critical consciousness and move each other to (re)imagine and build alternative, radical and liberatory futures beyond the realm of what we think is possible within our current structures. My project asks, as Walidah Imarisha writes in *Octavia's Brood's* introduction: 'are we brave enough to imagine beyond the boundaries of 'the real' and then do the hard work of sculpting reality from our dreams?' (Imarisha, 2015, p. 11).

LITERATURE REVIEW

ABOLITION FEMINISM

For abolition feminists, social injustice is caused by a carceral, punitive, profit-making logic that underlies our current social structures and institutions, such as: the prison, policing, the university, the family, mental health institutions, wage labour, and the nation-state. Abolition feminists do not want to *reform* these structures or institutions, rather they want to create an entirely different system based on alternative logics, such as care, justice and life. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore argues, ‘the goal is to change how we interact with each other and the planet by putting people before profits, welfare before warfare, and life over death’ (qtd. in Ben-Moshe, 2018, p. 353). Thus, abolition feminism is about getting to the root cause of issues of social injustice by demolishing our oppressive structures and – most importantly – building new ways of living. This building aspect is crucial, as the project of abolition feminism is a hopeful and imaginative one – it is about ‘creating new conditions of possibility by collectively contesting the status quo’ (Ben-Moshe, 2018, p. 353).

Fred Moten and Stefano Harney write:

What is, so to speak, the object of abolition? Not so much the abolition of prisons but the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage, and therefore not abolition as the elimination of anything but *abolition as the founding of a new society*. (2013, p. 42. My emphasis).

What this new society will look like once our old, oppressive system has been torn down, remains an open, exciting question for abolition feminists. They do not claim to have a blueprint of this new social order, because, as Halberstam notes, ‘once we have torn shit down, we will inevitably see more and see differently and feel a new sense of wanting and being and becoming’ (2013, p. 6). Abolition feminists argue persuasively that our current paradigm, with its interdependent systems of capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy, ableism, etc.,

obfuscate alternative possibilities of living and render them 'invisible' (Ben-Moshe, 2018, p. 351). This is a crisis of imagination whereby we find it near-impossible to imagine alternative possibilities of living, when, in fact, many of these 'abolitionist futures' are already taking place now (Duda, 2017; Kaur, 2018). For instance, many people are already living in non-nuclear families, with systems of mutual aid/non-capitalist care; certain societies are defunding the police (see Hart and Kight, 2020), and have transformative justice systems based on accountability and healing rather than punishment and shame (Morton, 2021). These already-existing abolitionist alternatives demonstrate that many people – especially those who are black or people of colour, transgender, queer, disabled or poor – cannot rely on our current oppressive 'justice', health and policing systems for safety and survival, and instead need to create alternative systems out of necessity. As we can see, abolition feminism is not merely a fanciful, utopian project: it is a faith in life, human beings and the planet, that we do not have to live a life of scarcity – that everyone can flourish, and that we have the ability to end suffering now (Olufemi in Silverpress, 2020).

THE ROLE OF THE IMAGINATION

A fundamental part of the abolition feminist project is to challenge the idea that these punitive, profit-making logics that govern our society are permanent, necessary and insurmountable. This is no easy task, as these ideals are deeply embedded into our culture. In the West, we have grown up with the messages that police will keep us safe, that prisons will keep the 'bad people' off our streets, and that the state has our best interests at heart.

As Angela Davis argues about the prison, these notions become:

...a key ingredient of our common sense. [The prison] is there, all around us. We do not question whether it should exist. It has become so much a part of our lives that it requires a great feat of the imagination to envision life beyond the prison. (Davis, 2003, p. 18).

Similarly, Mark Fisher argues that capitalism acts as a ‘pervasive atmosphere [...] constraining thought and action’ (2009, p. 22), and, in defining his core concept of ‘capitalist realism’, he invokes the pertinent phrase: ‘it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism’ (2009, p. 7). Fisher writes at the end of *Capitalist Realism*, however, that ‘the tiniest event can tear a hole in the grey curtain of reaction which has marked the horizons of possibility under capitalist realism’ (2009, p. 81). In other words, certain moments in our history and struggles (big or small) can make us think differently about what is possible in our society, broadening the ‘horizons’ of our imagination. I would argue that we are living through one such moment today with the Covid-19 pandemic and the global uprisings against white supremacy that were catalysed in June 2020 by the killing of George Floyd. Many people are seeing, perhaps for the first time, that the ways we are organising our society (through austerity, neoliberalism, white supremacy, ableism, and so on) are no longer working. Through these devastating events, many of our eyes are being opened to the blunt and brutal ways in which our current system prioritises profit and power over safety and survival (namely those of us who have had the privilege to have our eyes ‘closed’ up until now). This collective shift in imagination and understanding is potentially revolutionary – it allows us to see beyond the constraints of ‘capitalist realism’ and start to imagine and organise ourselves differently. To me, this makes the project of abolition feminism seem all the more achievable.

DARING TO DREAM: VISIONARY FICTION AND

OCTAVIA’S BROOD

Fiction, particularly science fiction, has long been used as a tool to support social transformation, such as feminist consciousness raising. In the 1960s and 70s, authors such as Ursula K. Le Guin and Marge Piercy were using feminist ideas to create speculative societies in their fiction which challenged restricted notions of gender, sexuality and justice against sexual violence. Soon after, Black feminist writer Octavia E. Butler wrote science fiction

novels including *Parable of the Sower* (2019) which explored climate collapse and wealth inequality in a dystopian future that is not far from our reality today. Butler's prophetic stories are still widely used by social justice organisers today, such as Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown, as powerful pedagogical teachings to help guide us through the present moment and to develop our social justice praxes. Some examples include: Octavia's Parables (maree brown and Reagon, 2020), a podcast series which analyses each chapter of *Parable of the Sower* in relation to the present day; organisers run reading circles, strategic circles and symposiums around Butler's work (see 'Octavia Butler's Strategic Reader', 2010); and Coleman and Due created the webinar series *Octavia Tried to Tell Us: Parable for Today's Pandemic* (2020) to use Butler's 'wisdom [...] as we live through these political days' (Coleman, 2020).

So, what makes science fiction such a useful tool for social justice organising, especially for abolition feminists? Walidah Imarisha fantastically claims that 'all [social justice] organising is science fiction' (2015, p. 10). She explains that 'organisers and activists dedicate their lives to creating and envisioning another world, or many other worlds—so what better venue for organisers to explore their work than science fiction stories?' (2015, p. 10). This is the premise of the short story collection *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements* (maree brown and Imarisha, 2015) which features science fiction short stories written by a diverse group of social justice organisers, many of whom have never written fiction before. The editors coin the term 'visionary fiction' to explain the work they are trying to do with this anthology. Unlike science fiction, visionary fiction:

... has relevance toward building new, freer worlds from the mainstream strain of science fiction, which most often reinforces dominant narratives of power. Visionary fiction encompasses all of the fantastic, with the arc always bending toward justice. (Imarisha, 2015, p. 10).

Creative Writing Gets Different

Thus, visionary fiction is about more than entertaining readers and exploring ideas – it is part of the abolition feminist imperative to actively ‘bring new worlds into existence [by] challeng[ing] the narratives that uphold current power dynamics and patterns’ (maree brown, 2015, p. 197).

As maree brown writes, ‘Science fiction is the perfect “exploring ground,” as it gives us the opportunity to play with different outcomes and strategies before we have to deal with the real-world costs’ (2015, p. 197). Creative writing allows us to play, experiment and dream in order to revolutionise our real-life circumstances. It is an imaginative yet serious endeavour as it cultivates our understanding of what change could look like and how we can build real-life alternatives structures, societies and ways of living. Through feeling and being moved by fiction, by being immersed into the emotional life-worlds of the stories and characters, for instance, we can be moved to *act*. This is what Lola Olufemi argues when talking about the importance of art in politics:

... feeling is a way of knowing and a powerful starting point for building a political framework. Affect, the ability to be moved, should never be underestimated. It is what brings us to feminist politics and what sustains us (2020, p. 86).

Here we can see the radical potential that visionary fiction holds in the struggle for social justice, as it plays a crucial role in liberating the imagination beyond the confines of what we believe is possible.

RESEARCH METHODS

I chose to use an autoethnographic approach for my research study because, as Stacey Holman Jones writes,

...autoethnography is a particularly agile approach for understanding and transforming the lived experience of selves and cultures as they are encountered and lived within systems and discourses of power, oppression, and privilege (2018, p. 4).

I have chosen to approach these large theoretical and social questions of transformation, imagination, power and oppression through the lens of the self because I support Haraway's claim that this perspectival 'view from a body' (qtd. in Holman Jones, 2018, p. 6) can help us to:

create living bodies of thought – work that uses story to bring theory alive and shows us how stories are embodiments of knowledges that can and do create movement and change in the world (Holman Jones, 2018, p. 7).

Aptly for my research into the transformational power of storytelling through visionary fiction, I am using my own personal story to bring my concern with abolition feminism alive – to 'mobilise and develop the explanatory frameworks that critical theory provides us [...] by putting that theory *into action* through storytelling' (Holman Jones, 2018, p. 6).

My study explores how reading and reflecting on seven short science fiction stories written by activists as part of the *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements* collection would impact my own ideas around social justice. Personally, I felt this was an interesting and important study that I wanted to undergo, and from a research perspective I felt that my autoethnographic findings would contribute to more abstract theory in the field. As Carolyn Ellis writes, 'being emotionally involved with what we study' and 'showing details instead of telling abstractly' are part of calling 'canons of social science research [...] into question' (1997, p. 128). I did not wish to make grand claims about fiction and social justice using theoretical analysis alone, rather I wanted to immerse myself emotionally in the experience of reading and responding to visionary fiction, to explore in detail how this process affects me as an activist, thinker and person. Only from this embodied, lived experience of truly feeling these stories and their impact can I speak full heartedly about the power of visionary fiction for social justice. Here I am doing what Tilley Lubbs and Bénard Calva describe as 'bringing together the personal and the political, making research a 'socially conscious act'' (2016, p. xiii).

COLLECTING MY DATA

Despite considering a range of short visionary fiction texts that would generate interesting autoethnographic responses, I decided to limit my study to the *Octavia's Brood* collection. This was partly because I was yet to read these stories which I thought would allow for a fresh perspective, but it was also because the project of the anthology aligned closely with the radical abolition feminist perspective I was intending to cultivate. In addition, the stories were a short length, and covered many diverse perspectives in social justice organising. What was most appealing to me about choosing this anthology, however, was that the stories were not written by self-proclaimed creative writers but by *activists*, which I felt brought a unique perspective into the study as it questions the binary between visionary fiction and social justice organising.

To collect my data, I chose 7 short stories from the 22 stories in *Octavia's Brood* to read and free-write my responses to. I chose the stories mostly as they appear in chronological order in the anthology, but also based on the areas of activism I was particularly drawn to, such as trauma-work, somatics, collective memory, and disability activism, and if I happened to be familiar with the author/activist. Due to the wide breadth of topics and approaches explored in the collection, however, I trusted that whichever stories I chose would provide a diverse basis for my analysis.

The table below outlines when I read each story and how I produced my free-written reflections:

Inspiration and Diversity

Story in Octavia's Brood	Date of reading and free-writing	Time of writing	Method of freewriting	Quantity of free-writing
<i>Evidence</i> by Alexis Pauline Gumbs	23/12/20	1.55pm	Handwritten in notebook	2 A4 pages
<i>Black Angel</i> by Walidah Imarisha	24/12/20	11.30am	Handwritten in notebook	1 A4 page
<i>Hollow</i> by Mia Mingus	28/12/20	1.30pm	Typed on word document	1000 words (approx. 4 handwritten pages)
<i>The Long Memory</i> by Morrigan Phillips	28/12/20	3.30pm	Typed on word document	1400 words (approx. 5.5 handwritten pages)
22XX: <i>One-Shot</i> by Jelani Wilson	01/01/21	4.40pm	Handwritten in notebook	½ an A4 page
<i>Children Who Fly</i> by Leah Lakshmi	01/01/21	5.20pm	Handwritten in notebook	3 A4 pages

Creative Writing Gets Different

Piepzna-Samarasinha				
<i>Revolution Shuffle</i> by Bao Phi	01/01/21	1.20pm	Handwritten in notebook	3 A4 pages

I had overarching questions as prompts for my free-writing, such as: How do I feel after reading this story? What particular emotions came up? How has this story made me reflect on my own social justice praxis? Is there anything I want to apply from this story to my life? I took inspiration here from *Octavia's Parables* (2020) podcast, where co-host adrienne maree brown asks prompting questions at the end of each episode based on the book's chapter and recommends listeners to journal their responses. Rather than making story-specific questions, however, I chose to keep them broad to allow my thoughts and emotions to emerge in an organic, unstructured way. I chose reflective journaling or free-writing because I find it to be a powerful way to process my thoughts and emotions, as the writing process becomes part of the thinking process, allowing for unconscious thoughts to arise. As Gillie Bolton writes,

Reflective writing enables the discovery of who and what we are in practice and why we act as we do. This process can be uneasy, leading to the uncertainty of genuine questioning, the foundation of all education. (2009, p. 753)

I also found it to be an interesting method in relation to responding to literary texts, because it resisted the temptation to construct a fully-formed literary analysis, as the speed and instantaneity of reflective free-writing allowed for more personal, embodied, unpolished responses. I found using my notebook far more conducive for this than typing; although typing allowed for more detailed thoughts written in a quicker amount of time,

when typing I found myself writing in a more formal, analytic style, focusing on retelling the plot rather than my own reflections.

DATA ANALYSIS

PERSPECTIVE, AFFECT AND NAVIGATING THE PRESENT

One of the things that struck me when analysing my free-written reflections was how the visionary stories from *Octavia's Brood* helped me to navigate the present political/historical moment. Some of the stories, particularly the more 'eutopian' stories (a 'eutopia', rather than 'utopia', refers to an attainable world which fosters human creativity and prosperity), provided a hopefulness and motivation for me to keep going, despite the despair I was feeling in the present day. One such story was *Evidence* by Alexis Pauline Gumbs which is set in a future eutopia after capitalism has ended. The story looks back at the dystopian past during capitalism (akin to our present day), which the story terms the period 'Before Silence Broke'. There are five archival 'exhibits' that comprise the story, including a letter written from a 12-year-old from the future called Alandrix to her ancestor Alexis ('Exhibit B'), and a letter from the author-activist Alexis after capitalism to herself during capitalism ('Exhibit E'). Both of these letters form a radical dialogue across time periods where the letter-writer reflects on what has changed and how they have arrived at this post-capitalist eutopia.

I read *Evidence* and wrote my reflections at a time when the Covid-19 pandemic was worsening and the UK was approaching a third lockdown. At the time, I was feeling afraid, angry and heartbroken at all the 'unnecessary deaths lost to the government's drive for capitalism' (my free-written notes), which had a profound impact on my relationship to this story. I felt that *Evidence* was concerned with the exact subject matter I was grappling with: political hope, possibility, despair and change. In my reflections, I write: 'There's something about reading this when everything feels so bleak [...] The world sits heavy today, and last week (and every day this year)'. I continue:

Creative Writing Gets Different

It felt like Alexis was writing this letter to me, or that I found it at the right time, when her 12-year-old protagonist reassures us that *'everything works out'* and tells us *'So when you get afraid to speak, remember that you all were part of us learning how to just do it'*. Reading science fiction at this time feels exactly why science fiction was written. To help us navigate our own disbelief at our experience. As so many of us are here in this moment, flailing, hope dwindling, tears rolling and just trying to survive, these words speak to us from the future, a future written in the past. [...] To hear someone telling you to *'breathe deep, beloved young and frightened self, and then let go'*, is a life-raft, it's supernatural. To hear someone say *'we did it, we shifted the paradigm. We rewrote the meaning of life with our living'* – it makes you want to keep living.

Here, my emotional reflections demonstrate how this story gave me some much-needed perspective on how to navigate this political, historical moment and to maintain faith and hope to keep going and continue fighting for change. This speculative story helped me to locate myself in a larger trajectory of social transformation as it allowed me to imagine this difficult time I am living in as a mere part of a momentous shift towards a more just and liberatory future (*'remember that you all were part of us learning how to just do it'* (p. 32)). This notion grounded me and acted as a *'life-raft'*, a pertinent example of the profound way that stories can touch our lives and how *'affect'*, as Olufemi argues, can *'sustain us'* in feminist politics. My experience outlined above demonstrates the *timelessness yet timeliness* of visionary fiction: the way it can speak to us simultaneously from the past and the future whilst still seeming pertinent to that present moment.

The directness of the letter form was what I found most impactful (and *'supernatural'*) about *Evidence*, as my reflections show it felt like it was being written *'to me'*. However, a story which used a different method of affective engagement was *Revolution Shuffle* by Bao Phi, which artfully used character relationships and evocative descriptions to create an emotional impact. In this tender story,

we follow a male and female protagonist on the brink of revolution, musing about what they miss about the ‘normal world’ before everything descended into war, plague and disaster. Phi’s delicate descriptions of the characters’ smiles – ‘she smiled her radiant, breathtakingly beautiful smile for him. It got even wider when she saw his rare, small smile finally break across his face, a hairline fracture on an egg’ (2015, p. 17) – had a subtle yet powerful impact on my ideas about navigating historical crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic today. In my reflections, I write:

This story makes you realise that when things get really, impossibly bad, you find a way to survive that you didn’t know was possible. It speaks to human resilience, and hope amongst despair and disbelief. That even amongst death and destruction, hope and beauty prevails – we find a fire, a resource, inside ourselves that doesn’t let us give up. Even when headed for total war and chaos, we can find meaning in each other’s smiles, in what we eat, read, watch and consume.

Although this story also contained a fascinating eutopic, grand narrative, it was the emotional connection of the protagonists that provided me with a reminder of what keeps us going in ‘impossible’ times: that we must find meaning, beauty and connection in order to survive. Phi’s delicate relationship wonderfully supplemented the more cognitive, conceptual eutopic narratives in the anthology, returning me to the question of from where I am drawing meaning, beauty and connection during the difficulty of this present moment. These emotional practices are an essential aspect of my social justice praxis as they allow me to remain grounded and connected to myself, which was reaffirmed by reading and reflecting on this story.

WRESTLING WITH CORE BELIEFS

To return to Alexis Pauline Gumbs’ story *Evidence*, a powerful aspect of my reflections was the way that the story prompted me to rigorously question my core beliefs. In my reflections,

Creative Writing Gets Different

I write:

Alexis Pauline Gumbs gives us ‘the answer’ to how they ended capitalism: ‘We let go and re-taught ourselves to breathe the presence of the energy that we are that cannot be destroyed, but only transformed and transforming everything’. And for a moment, for half an hour on a Wednesday, it all feels clear, it all feels possible. But then I think of [a list of Tory politicians] and I think – what the fuck are they going to do with that ‘answer’? When will they ever see that? Maybe there’s too many people to be transformed. But maybe I have to listen to Alexis and breathe deep, and let go. Trust her. Trust the energy inside myself and in all of us, even in them. And know that this way of living is unsustainable. That it will end. That we will ‘shift the paradigm’. That there is no other way.

As my initial hope vacillates between despair and doubt, it is clear that I do not take these stories’ messages and clues for how to navigate social justice issues for granted. Instead, I wrestle with them and ask: Is this enough? Do I believe this approach really works in practice? Here we can see how engaging with the stories in *Octavia’s Brood* forms a powerful springboard for me to question my core beliefs, a highly effective mechanism for building a more in-depth, resilient social justice praxis. It is clear to me that this depth of engagement with my ideas around transformation was enabled by the *emotionality* of the story: the letter writing form and language used touched me in a way that perhaps could not have been achieved by theory or non-fiction, or by a writer who did not have the lived experience of being part of social justice movements.

I build on this idea of finding ‘clues’ and ‘answers’ to navigating social justice issues in one of my final free-writes in response to *Children Who Fly* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha. Here I reflect on being at an early stage of my social justice journey where I am ‘constantly trying to decide what to prioritise and what is most urgent’, which, I write, feels like ‘an impossible

question when everything feels like it's falling down, burning – healthcare, education, justice systems, mental health, isolation, pandemics'. I reflect on how I had initially hoped *Octavia's Brood* would give me some 'answers', but instead I decide that these visionary stories are:

...not spoon-feeding me how to literally do everything or solve the world. They are showing me the multi-layered approaches out there necessary for social change. [...] They remind me – do not forget the spiritual, or the body [...] don't forget disabled bodies and their creativity and agency, don't forget the energy that runs through us, the presence of life, don't forget to breathe, to let go. I take all these clues with me on my journey and my toolbelt thickens.

This excerpt feels like an apt summary of my experience of engaging with these stories, how reading and reflecting on the stories from *Octavia's Brood* has been an accumulative process of learning from 'the abundance of imagination [those] in the social justice realm hold' (maree brown, 2015, p. 197). The metaphor of this process having 'thickened my toolbelt' speaks to the diverse, multiplicity of ideas and wisdom I have garnered from these stories, which I will take with me on my journey as I continue to learn and develop my social justice praxis and build confidence and conviction.

CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

It is clear that engaging with visionary fiction written by activists in *Octavia's Brood* had a profound impact on my social justice praxis as it helped me to navigate my own thoughts and feelings about social justice in our current times and explore my beliefs around what is necessary for social transformation. Reflecting on these stories using free-writing allowed for a rigorous, emotional and conceptual engagement around ideas of social change, resulting in feelings of hope, inspiration, and improved confidence and conviction in my beliefs.

As I have outlined, similar work to my study that uses visionary fiction to develop social justice praxes already exists, for instance in movement spaces where activists are using Octavia E. Butler's work to refine their ideas and reflect on their present context. I second what Sheree Renee Thomas writes in the forward to *Octavia's Brood*:

May [the anthology] spawn new conversations in classrooms, inspire vigorous discussion in coffeehouses and book clubs, and create new organizing tools and 'case studies' for strategizing in our community organizations (p. 9).

In addition to Thomas' community-based suggestions, I hope to see Octavia's Brood and other examples of visionary fiction being used for more personal reflection and self-development, as my study has demonstrated its potential for developing one's critical consciousness, core beliefs, and sustained feelings of hope and political momentum. It would be inspiring to see these ideas being applied in mainstream educational settings, for instance using visionary fiction in schools or universities to cultivate students' ideas and feelings about social change. Variations of this as a pedagogical approach already exist, arguably as what Bell Hooks describes in her book *Teaching to Transgress* as 'education as the practice of freedom' (1994). However, this is a contested issue because the interests of the state and thus of the neoliberal education system is to sustain the current social order and not, as Freire argues, 'to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed' (2018, p. 73) (a pertinent current example of this is the UK government's recent banning of anti-capitalist teaching material in schools (see Busby 2020)). This would require mainstream education institutions to essentially question their own existence, and as Black liberation activist Assata Shakur aptly writes, 'no one is going to give you the education to overthrow them' (qtd. in All Power Podcast, 2019). Despite these conflicting interests of abolition feminists and the state, I would argue that visionary fiction such as *Octavia's Brood* provides a useful, artistic guise for revolutionary abolition feminist ideas because of their openness to interpretation. Due to its fictional nature, visionary fiction can be taught in a way that inspires and expands the

imagination without overtly challenging the system. Unlike abolition feminist theory, visionary fiction's radical potential can slip under the radar, making it a highly powerful tool for personal and social transformation even within neoliberal settings, whilst simultaneously offering a valuable creative pursuit in its own right.

This study has been deeply inspiring and hopeful to write – personally, politically and academically – and I hope that it reminds us of what Imarisha describes as ‘that right Butler claimed for each of us – the right to dream as ourselves, individually and collectively [...] a responsibility she handed down’ (2015, p. 11). I hope my study has shown that by engaging deeply with visionary fiction we have the power to liberate our imaginations beyond what society deems as possible and thus collectively fight for and build an alternative, liberatory reality.

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HOW CAN I FEEL SAFE WHEN WRITING CREATIVELY? SARA CARROLL

'I am a little anxious... writing is always difficult.'

Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary* (Woolf,
1954, p25)

This paper is an exploration into the complex personal reaction I have to creative writing. As a child I was a reader, and as a rather shy child, I think writing stories, poems and running my own newspaper were a response to that reading; a way of making real my own safe, imaginative world. My careers in publishing and then as a secondary English teacher have kept me engaging with language and imagination, but have also, because of their analytical nature, distanced me from my own creativity and encouraged a harsh inner critic. Now, as an adult, I am often unable to get down to the writing I most desire to do. When I first started this personal research, I was convinced my reluctance was poorly concealed procrastination, but as I dug deeper, I realised it was really fear that was holding me back; even though I longed to write, all I could think about were the dangers awaiting me. I wanted to use this research opportunity to address that perilous position and move my creativity into a place of strength: 'Being without fear seems the key... Our nightmares are fearful enough: our dreams, I think, must be better and louder and unafraid.' (Kennedy, 2014, p.243)

Even as I write this, I can admit to feeling vertiginously unsafe; there is a lurking sense that I am opening myself up to accusations of 'navel-gazing' and self-indulgence. Yet I have chosen my research methods carefully: through a bricolage of autoethnography, action research and a simple questionnaire sent to writers I know, I intend to show how I have explored my own creative methods, and, in the process, found a pathway to face my fears. I am also interested in how this research reflects on my practice as a teacher of reluctant secondary school writers, following an 'emancipatory approach' (Lather, 1986, p.257) which

embraces the complexity of individuality through postpositivist, qualitative research.

THREATS TO SAFETY

Choreographer Twyla Tharp lists five 'mighty demons' she has to acknowledge before facing dancers at the beginning a new project. (Tharp, 2006, p22) I thought it might be useful to list my own frightening demons in a similar way.

1. Writing honestly means dealing with difficult emotions.
2. Other writers have said it all, and said it better.
3. I have nothing to say.
4. I will never be taken seriously as a writer.

Simply naming them turns a light on to the monsters in the room. Tharp goes a step further by attacking hers with a 'staring-down ritual' and answers each one boldly. Like Tharp, I realised that I was allowing my fears to 'shut down my impulses... turn off the spigots of creativity.' (Tharp, 2006, p22) It was not enough just to recognise these fears, I needed to investigate how they worked their poison on me, so that I could find my own way to stare them down and write.

THREE AUTOETHNOGRAPHICAL PICTURES

Three girls, all with red curly hair tied up in a different way. Girl one, let's call her Jane, is standing, waiting for her mother to back the car up a steep drive to take her to her first day at secondary school. She wears long white socks, brown lace-up shoes, hair in two bunches hanging low over her ears. A blue A-line skirt, white blouse, blue V-neck jumper, a red and silver striped tie, and a blue blazer with a dragon on the breast pocket. In front of her she holds a brown briefcase, not the hard kind that would be useful in a crowded corridor, but the soft leather kind with two pockets at the front. At this moment she holds it in front of her knees, both hands on the stiff leather handle. In a week's times she will have experimented with slinging it over her shoulder, casually, or swinging it from the front flap, disdainfully. Anything that separated her from the hideous formality of everything it represented.

Creative Writing Gets Different

Girl two, Gemma this time. Standing at the barre in first position, hair scraped into a bun and forced, by over forty pins and a long burst of hairspray, to defy gravity, creating the perfect line from forehead to toe tip. Pale pink tights with a seam that runs from heel to bottom, a black leotard, black knitted crossover and blue legwarmers pulled over calves and knees. Pink leather shoes with wide pink elastic on her feet, another pair of hard satin pointe shoes wrapped in their own ribbons, stowed under the barre where she awaits instructions. Shoulders down, tummy in, bum tucked under, soft arms, neck extended, listen, watch, extend, turn out: the reflection of herself she saw in the mirror was commanded into shape from the outside in, and Gemma hoped that this lesson would be one when the teacher finally said, 'Good.'

Girl three, Elizabeth I think, dressing for her university final exams. Hair up, for concentration, but only four pins this time. Black skirt, white blouse, black tie, black tights, black shoes, ribboned gown and a bump on the third finger of her right hand betraying the weeks of sitting at her desk, 'learning'. She glances over at the stacks of book and folders, on the floor, on the shelf, on the desk; should she take one more flick through? She threads her head through the strap of a small handbag containing three pens, one pencil and an ugly pebble for luck. There was nothing beyond this moment, everything rested on this final paper: validation, respect, employment. If only they didn't have to wear black tights in June.

Muncey suggests that autoethnography is a very suitable research method for someone exploring the concept of creative writing; it 'privileges the individual' (Muncey, 2010, p.3) and these short creative pieces represent the part of my research when I placed myself in the dual roles of observer and observed, in order to make sense of the background to my writing world. (Muncey, 2010) The three girls are, of course, me at different stages of my life, and it wasn't until I started this autoethnographical experiment that I realised how the descriptions of my hair and clothes had become metaphors for my own experience and some of the fears that underpin my attitude to writing creatively. I had a very rigid education, indicated by the uniform which, with its tie and blazer, smacks of a controlling patriarchy in the education system, and, as my parents were both grammar school teachers,

which was endorsed at home. I was often taken to and from school in the safety of a car, and had to have a sensible briefcase which protected my books. The second self-portrait describes my passion for ballet and dance as a teenager, the clothes, once again, reflecting the strictures of learning and the rules I willingly followed. Blue legwarmers were my worst rebellion. The last sketch is of me leaving my college room for my finals at Oxford, where, once again, appearance is of the essence, and the ancient requirement of all students to sit exams in full 'sub fusc' becomes a metaphor for the inflexible approach to learning I encountered there in the 1980s. I was being creative through all of these periods of my life: writing stories and poetry for school and myself, choreographing dances and routines, acting in as many plays as I could be cast in, and reviewing arts events for a university magazine. Even though these ventures were very important to me, and I was interested in some kind of creative future, I did not know how to help myself get there. This initial, autoethnographical research had quickly revealed how my controlled, privileged, middle-class upbringing, with its extensive rules and regulations, and deification of 'good' writers and artists, suggested to me that I had no place in that world; that I should never expose myself to that sort of risk; that I would never be good enough. I was, in fact, told as much at an exit interview with my college principal. Is it any wonder then that as the clock of middle-age ticks, and the compulsion gets stronger, I have imposter syndrome when faced with my own creativity?

FINDING A NEW COAT

For the next stage of my research, it was clear that I needed to find ways of lowering the stakes for myself, to continue the metaphor, to slip into something more comfortable and freeing, away from the obsession with not making mistakes that my education had instilled in me. (Elbow, 1998) My first decision was to give myself daily space to do some free writing and I did this for ten minutes every day for the best part of ten weeks. The idea of writing 'unencumbered by ego' (Goldberg, 1986 p.9) appealed to me – for what was my adherence to uniform and rules if not something to satisfy my ego and superego? (Freud,

1923) Elbow encourages free writers to ‘make a mess’ (Elbow, 1998, p.24) as a counter move against the rigidity of writing to a plan or outline taught in school. I am an Olympic level planner, even though I often use free writing in my teaching to encourage relaxation and creativity; I could see there was a case for the physician needing to heal herself. My “habit of compulsive, premature editing” (Elbow, 1998, p.6) meant that even as I was writing I constantly told myself I wasn’t good enough and had nothing to say. Perhaps free writing could liberate me from those feelings. There was also a pragmatic element to setting myself this task: ‘Write every day... Good writing practice is about discipline.’ (Bell & Magyrs, 2001, p.5-6) If procrastination was also impeding me, setting up a daily expectation would help structure writing into my day. If nothing else, my education had provided me with an excellent sense of duty, and I knew I could follow a schedule: when the voice in my head tried to tell me I didn’t have the leisure to spend ten minutes a day in this way, I could reply that it was part of my research.

ANALYSIS OF FREE WRITING JOURNAL DATA

I embraced the free writing enthusiastically as part of my daily routine, and was thrilled by the way the pages of my notebook were filling up, (and I was sleeping better!) but when I came to sift through the words with my research question in mind, I realised that I was faced with quite a jumble of information. This was to be expected from qualitative research (Gilbert & Macleroy, 2020) but I needed to develop an analytical framework that was helpful to me. At first, I considered a chronological approach which, once I had finished re-reading the ten weeks’ worth of entries, would have yielded a sort of jagged chart; free-writing and human nature being what they are, the lack of consistency in my feelings was distracting and just as I started to get somewhere (‘I love it!’ 30 November 2020) I would be blown off course and plunged into defeatism. (‘I think I shouldn’t be a writer’ 18 December 2020) It made more sense for me to group themes together which allowed me to develop ‘thick description’ (Cohen, 2017, p.647) in order to answer the question of how I can feel safe when writing creatively. My themes are: Self-

exploration, *The Art of Writing and Sitting in the Zone of Proximal Development*.

SELF-EXPLORATION

At the beginning of this process, my entries read very like a diary which records the feelings and events I experienced during the day. Having kept a diary through much of my life, this kind of reflection felt natural to me. Analysis of diary entries is an intimate glimpse into the workings of the self, and research into journal writing revealed that I was using a tried and tested therapeutic tool, whether it was the Jungian practice of unifying the conscious (deciding to write things down) with the unconscious (free-writing about anything that was on my mind), or a Freudian search for the key to the psyche. (Rainer, 1978) Much of what I wrote was dark and angry. At times I did a lot of moaning and blaming, harking back to difficult events in the past and griping about problems in the present. I can see a link here with a therapy developed by Masatake Morita for neurosis patients in Tokyo in 1920, part of which was to keep a journal to record past traumas as well as day to day observations, in order to learn to accept life as it is.

More recent research describes therapeutic free writing as dynamic talking to oneself, (Elbow, 1998) and 'a process of deep listening' (Bolton, 2011, p.18) as though the act of putting difficult feelings into words on a page creates a defusing dialogue. 'Talking to yourself can be useful. And writing means being overheard,' (Smith, 2020, p.xi) and I was starting to experience this myself, during my free writing research. While I remained nervous of articulating painful emotions in my journal, once the thoughts were out there on the page, however emotive or difficult or quirky, I found I was able to sit with them in a mindful way as though part of Gestalt therapy, and I accepted them without fighting them. Mindful practice in creative writing is gaining academic traction, and mindfulness as part of a writing practice, is a recognised way to find stillness from the internal editor, observe the world in a non-threatened way and overcome difficulties (Gilbert, 2019). While I wasn't practising mindfulness

before I started writing, the act of writing itself put me in a mindful, less frightened place.

THE ART OF WRITING

Analysing my comments on the practice of writing actually revealed another constriction to my feeling safe: integrity. I write a great deal in my journal about being 'truthful' and 'honest' and 'right', and I am also very fond of the modal verbs should, could, ought and might. If free-writing is emptying out what is at the forefront of one's mind, a psychological reading of this language might point immediately to my fear of 'getting it wrong.' The link with my initial autoethnographical sketches is undeniable. Then I found a phrase in my journal that suggested something more; 'sometimes my writing is performative.' (8 December 2020) I continue to muse for a page or two, on the value, or otherwise, of using humour in writing, which seemed to me the most obvious way in which I 'performed'. I often view humour in writing with suspicion: the ultimate hiding of truth through cruel mockery of the self or others. My free-writing conversation on this subject finally lands on what I thought was a clear answer to my research question, how can I feel safe when writing creatively? 'By not being performative' (8 December 2020).

In examining this particular preoccupation, I was drawn to Erving Goffman's sociological work, in which he explores the concept of the dramatization of the self, which humans use both to pick up information about others as well as control the revelation of information about themselves (Goffman, 1990). He proposes that performance is a natural part of human interaction. While Goffman's idiosyncratic observations of social performance do suggest deceit or deliberate delusion, he makes it clear that human performance is not without its protecting features, namely that performance requires rehearsal so that errors in presentation can be ruled out: the 'dirty work' (Goffman, 1990, p.53) is hidden and what is presented is more palatable to the viewer. If this is the case, my condemnation of my performative writing is misplaced. It could, in fact, be a form of protection, and has the potential to help me feel safe from the external critics I

feared. My life has been full of performance: as a dancer and an actor, and now, in difficult work situations, I can assume a confident external persona who hides the nervous internal one. What, therefore, could be bad about using writing as a performance, if it is an opportunity to try on different clothes and shelter one's vulnerability? Elsewhere in my journal I had written, 'I wish I had some armour to put on.' (21 November 2020) Zadie Smith thanks Virginia Woolf for teaching her 'To replace that missing layer of skin with language.' (Smith, 2020, p.78) This close examination of my free writing was helping me view writing not as a threat, but a much-needed protective layer.

SITTING IN THE ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT (WITH MY SLIPPERS ON)

Writing freely in disciplined daily slots allowed me to set up a cognitivist route to learning about the process of writing creatively (Pritchard, 2010): a personal understanding of what writing really means to me could help me feel safer. Free writing is overtly constructivist in approach. (Pritchard, 2010) I was recreating, through my writing discipline, what I aim to create in my classroom as a secondary English teacher: a place where metacognition and independent thinking is encouraged. I had created a sort of social constructivism and the conversation my free writing provided me with was a Vygotsky style dialogue with myself, through which I was reaching towards a better understanding of my own writing process, and gradually shifting my attitude. (Pritchard, 2010) To the frequent cryptic question 'Writing?' in my journal, I replied: 'I'm pushing past the road block that says my words are not valid... '(11 November 2020) My ten minutes is good, but I need more' (28 November 2020) ... it feels like I am floating along the top saying the right words, digging down occasionally when I'm strong enough and getting angry when I can't see clearly to articulate what doesn't feel right (10 December 2020) ... I am enjoying writing much more now. I have more options for material.' (12 December 2020) Through the practice of daily free writing, I was putting myself in a position to learn about my own process, which was not something I had ever considered necessary before. As an undergraduate, heavily

influenced by those around me, I viewed good writing as something that happened through osmosis if I read enough classic texts, or that it was a mystical gift only bestowed on the blessed (Gilbert & Macleroy, 2020). I had not considered trying to understand how I wrote in order to help myself believe I could write. Writing is a powerful way of understanding ourselves and our practice. (Bolton, 2009)

STANDING IN FRONT OF THE MIRROR

As I started to gather entries from my journal on a wide variety of topics, I saw that I had plenty of ideas to write about, and the thought of creating something more concrete was much less frightening. With clear ideas on the page in front of me, there was less room for self-doubt: I had something to say. The next step was to see if I felt safe enough to say it in a more formal, structured way. Bolton explores how shaping work creatively in a spirit of enquiry, brings out an emotional truth and can help the vulnerable individual, and I was particularly struck by her chapter on 'The Power of the Metaphor.' (Bolton, 2014) As an English teacher, the power of figurative language was not news to me, but encountering it as a form of reflection and reflexivity in CPD training gave me permission to stop viewing metaphor as the highest form of poetic expression and something 'difficult', (my students' voices echoing in my head!) and start to use it as an effective way of processing some of the ideas which came up in my free writing journal.

Another strand of my action research was therefore to set myself the challenge of writing one piece of shaped work each week: it did not matter what form it took (poetry or prose) and it did not have to come out of the ten minutes of free writing I had been doing each day, but it was a time when I made that 'conscious effort.' (McNichol, 2016, p 38) Giving myself time and space to do this, with plenty of ideas in front of me, became a highlight of the week, and while not all pieces were completely satisfying to me, several, with their roots in my real experience, became poems I was proud of. Perhaps the most acute of these was the one I wrote after a Saturday afternoon in which I had to take my

cat to the vet, after being hit by a car, and my father to the hospital for an MRI scan for dementia. It was a day of heightened emotions, an evening when I could barely do my ten minutes of writing because I could not ignore the frightened voices in my head: my sentences were short and declarative, the narrative a list of what happened. But the synchronicity of events kept me focused, and I couldn't ignore the obvious links between the two parts of the day. The resulting poem took its structure from the original, frightened piece of free writing. And at the bottom of the notes in my journal and the first draft of the poem, I have written 'Getting back on track'. (7 November 2020) Taking the time to reflect by writing a poem had opened up the metaphorical depth behind the signifiers I had used in my notes, and allowed myself a safe space in which to process and reflect. I had faced the mirror (Bolton, 2014), and rather than just looking into it, I had helped myself through it, and I had survived! Not only did I now have something to write about, but I could start to do the kind of creative writing I longed to do, and include the truth and honesty I craved. Form and structure have always been interesting to me and there seems to be an obvious parallel between the heightened discipline of ballet and poetic form, two things I learned about early in my life. Now, with some confident ideas in front of me, I could start to gain ownership of my own creative purpose, drawing positively on those technical but valuable lessons from the past. Writing became an absorbing, fearless experiment, as I encountered and processed my feelings at a pace and in a way most appropriate for me.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

As part of the 'triangulation' (Bell, 2010, p 118) of my research I decided to ask writers I knew to answer some own key questions I had about writing. I tried to make these questions as focused as possible, (Cohen, 2017) but with a very small cohort of participants (four), and the nature of the subject, I felt that space for individual interpretation was appropriate. I was not sure, after all, whether safety when writing was something other writers would understand. My interviewees included two young, ambitious writers, who are prolific but, as yet, unpublished in

print, and two established poets about my own age and background.

THE ANSWERS

WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND BY THE PHRASE FEELING SAFE WHILE WRITING?

While there was clear acknowledgement that writing contained inherent danger or lack of safety, this question prompted universal agreement about the therapeutic uses of writing to explore the self and the imagination. More than one answer suggested that safety lay in being able to hide in a piece of work, and that writing could objectify vulnerability. This seems to link closely with what I had already discovered about the protecting qualities of the self-dramatisation I found in Goffman's research, and the transformative power of explorative metaphor suggested by Bolton.

DO YOU EVER FEEL UNSAFE WHEN WRITING? WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS? AND WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSE WHEN THAT HAPPENS?

There was some agreement here on fear about how work would be received, and an acknowledgment that making writing available to others is a risky business. There was also some awareness of the difficulty of the internal editor and while one writer gave a graphic description of how furious they become with themselves when reaching a 'dead end', another mused on the fact that all creators face the voice within and that dealing with it builds resilience. This second idea was one I had not considered before, and helped me view creative writing as a more muscular, practical activity. Bolton shares evidence of an interesting, circular practice when a writer describes using writing to get themselves through particularly tough battles with their inner editors. They used a technique of slowing down their observation and recording minute details of the world around them. This simple act kept them off the 'self-blaming treadmills' (Bolton, 2011, p.43) and the

idea of using writing to overcome blocks and build resilience is something I will try in the future.

WHERE DO YOU PLACE YOUR READING IN RELATION TO YOUR WRITING?

There was whole-hearted agreement in answer to this question: that they are inextricably linked. Reading for all the writers is an important (sometimes visceral) experience that leads, often through imitation, to the improvement of their own creative voice. I have already referred to the weight I sense from having studied and analysed so much canonical literature. The words of my interviewees are a timely reminder that reading good literature is very much part of being a writer, indeed, that writing might often be a direct response to 'mysterious promptings' from authors (Prose, 2006, p9) and that imitation is not a sign of weakness or unoriginality. I have subsequently tried to walk alongside the colossuses who bestride my literary world: I have begun to slow my reading down, weigh the lexis more personally, investigate sentence types more forensically, and yes, imitate what I have liked. (Prose, 2006) I am starting to take a different perspective on my literary heroes and heroines. It wasn't a case of knocking them off their pedestals (although the hour spent on a feminist reading of Keats was liberating) but allowing myself to feel part of a creative community who share a desire to create with words. Through my engagement as a reader, I could feel part of a community spanning centuries and continents. (Blommaert, 2017) This perception of community was backed up by the answers to my final question.

WHY DO YOU THINK YOU WRITE?

Once again there was broad agreement in the responses: compulsion. And all four of them wrote something that resonated with the personal feelings and truths I had uncovered elsewhere in my research: 'I write because I love the feeling of having written... Writing makes a lot of things easier... I write to be free of things... I write because I always have.' Although we are

Creative Writing Gets Different

not physically part of a Community of Practice (Wenger, 1999) hearing their answers to my questions chime with my own feelings felt like personal validation, and by asking the questions, and listening to the answers, I had stepped into a support system of people I knew and respected, working towards a common goal through sharing and contributing to the same practice.

I was flattered at the time my respondents devoted to answering the questions and, being writers, their fulsome answers were delightful to read. I was clearly not unusual in feeling unsafe while writing and our feelings had their roots in similar ground. Their positivity about how to overcome or embrace fears underlined what I had already begun to realise and seen backed up in my other research, that rather than a place of threat and danger, creative writing can be, in itself, a place of safety.

CONCLUSION

So, I had arrived at an answer to my question, but it was not quite the answer I had expected. I suppose I anticipated the practical solutions of free writing and mindful reading, but I hadn't bargained for this repeated demonstration, that writing itself is a place of safety and community; that the secret to staring down my demons lay in the very writing I was swerving miserably to avoid. Or perhaps I did know this, but only by undertaking practical research could I allow myself to believe it.

I am, of course, grateful for my privileged education and all the opportunities it offered me, but doing this research is a reminder that institutional education is a blunt instrument when dealing with individuals. By using the very words I have heard in the classroom when naming my own fears about writing – 'I'm scared. What if I get it wrong? I don't know what to say' – I have been reminded that education itself can make the individual, each with their own unique experience of life, feel vulnerable. If the holistic praxis of creative writing can help build a supportive community, and be a safe tool for metacognition and self-exploration, (Cremin & Myhill, 2012) it should play a vital role in the classroom, and I am pleased I have had the opportunity to

experience this in a practical way myself. Of course, writing holds fears and risks: 'to write is to take risks, and it is only by taking risks that we know we are alive.' (Atwood, 2015, p.xix) If I can't take those risks, and by extension take myself seriously as a writer, I cannot expect my students, or anyone else to do the same.

My fear, and its trusty associate procrastination, are not unusual in the community of writers; those abstracts don't make us less able, but nothing can come of nothing and if we want to silence their voices, we have to pick up the pen. There is nothing easy about this need to create with words: 'writing has to do with darkness and a desire or perhaps a compulsion to enter it...' (Atwood, 2015, p xxii) and if 'darkness' is part of the package, we do ultimately have to find a way to withstand it, even embrace it. And now I think I am ready to do that: I'll be the one in t-shirt, jeans and flip-flops.

Many thanks to the four writers who answered my questionnaire.

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JAMES BALDWIN AND ME: DEBORAH FRIEDLAND

HOW DID READING BALDWIN IN MY FORMATIVE
YEARS INFLUENCE MY CREATIVE WRITING AND
MOTIVATE ME AS AN ASPIRING WRITER?

“On days like this,” Cass said, suddenly, “I remember what it was like--I think I remember--to be young, very young.” She looked up at him. “When everything, touching and tasting--everything--was so new, and even suffering was wonderful because it was so complete.” *Another Country* James Baldwin (1962, p. 269)

INTRODUCTION

In this essay, I will attempt to do three things. Firstly, using Tessa Muncey’s ideas in *Creating Autoethnographies* (Muncey 2014) and Gillie Bolton’s on reflective writing (Bolton, 2010), I will write an autoethnographic account of how I came across James Baldwin’s work as a teenager and what it meant to me at this formative time. I will examine ways in which it influenced me on questions of identity and social justice and inspired my writerly ambition. Autoethnography gives one the chance to look not through the self-deprecating ‘retrospectoscope’ of middle age, nor a telescope of glass and wood that promises objectivity, but through the kaleidoscopic lens of past personal experience that offers itself up for re-evaluation within a sociocultural context. Psychologists tell us it is important to look at one’s life as a whole and draw on the ‘sustenance of the past’ while maintaining a vital connection with the present. If our younger and older selves are ‘viscerally enmeshed’ (Karpf, p.124-125) then an autoethnographic account which ‘challenges traditional writing conventions’ (Muncey, p.29) is a sympathetic vehicle to make this

link. Memories are 'highly vulnerable to reshaping by your current circumstances' (Feldman Barrett, p.239) therefore creative writing, journals and artefacts not refracted by time are a more reliable and stable resource to draw on for this account.

Secondly, I will investigate more about Baldwin's life and philosophy from his close friend and personal assistant David Leeming's authorised biography (Leeming, 1994) as well as by reading critical accounts of his life and work by fellow writers and friends (Troupe, 1989) which provide a deeper insight into the stories behind his essays and novels. I will also reread Baldwin's third novel *Another Country* (1962) as well as a selection of other writing, all of which were a major influence on me.

When, as a young person, one admires someone, one seeks to emulate them and so thirdly, I will reread my own novel *When I Come Home* (1982), written in my early twenties in order to identify aspects of Baldwin's themes, language, and style that I used as a guide. A question I want to investigate is how the wide cast of characters from his polyphonic novels interacted with my circle from that time and influenced my own developing style. I am not going to adopt the role of literary critic and assess the quality or otherwise of my early writing, nor will I critique the differences between men's and women's writing, (whether in terms of opportunity, sexual politics or reception) or adopt a specifically feminist perspective I have also explored over time (Woolf, 1979, Heilbrun, 1988 and many others). My interest here is to try to draw some conclusions about how Baldwin arrived at a point in my life that empowerment pioneers David Gerson and Gail Straub call the 'growing edge' – the part of our being where new growth is occurring (Gershon and Straub, p.12, p 67). For a young aspiring writer the most important aspects of that process are reading, itself the world's greatest mentoring scheme, and discovering that creativity is a passion and lifelong pursuit; as Julia Cameron asserts in *The Artist's Way* a spiritual practice one follows throughout life that cannot be 'perfected, finished or set aside' (Cameron, p.182).

AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT

I was at the library in Queens Avenue, Muswell Hill, with my new friend M. It was after class at the local technical college where I was a reluctant student aged 16. I look back at schooling as a daytime prison full of limitations, mediocrity and alienation; we sat dreamily writing out song lyrics at the back of the science lesson while the teacher called out, "If there's anything you don't understand girls, ask one of the boys." It did not help that my older sister gave me a copy of *Deschooling Society* by Ivan Illich (1971) around this time. In it we are told a good educational system should provide resources, empowerment and opportunity (Illich, p.75). From my teenage perspective, none of these were much in evidence.

In hindsight, I learned a lot from those traditional English lessons. I loved Austen, Dickens, Shakespeare and the First World War poets we studied for 'O' Level English. But at the time I just knew I had to live and breathe my dream. School did not allow for passion, deep experiences of love and friendship, talking all night about philosophy, music and how to make the world a better place. As the separation process from parents begins in earnest, I believe all teenagers set far more store by their horizontal bonds with friends than they do the vertical bonds with their elders. I did not see much of my parents as they were absent both physically and emotionally so I was left to my own devices much of the time. That day at the library, I found an albeit unlikely mentor, in the fiery black American gay male writer James Baldwin.

M picked up *If Beale Street Could Talk* off a shelf (Baldwin, 1974) and said 'Have you read this? It's really good.' I had never heard of James Baldwin and so took the novel out of the library on her recommendation. I thank M, in sisterhood, for this life-changing moment. M passed away a few years ago. We had not seen each other for many years, life having taken us in different directions both emotionally and geographically but there is something about the power of intense youthful friendships that can never be replicated later in life. When I went to M's funeral, I was thrown

back into a distant world, seeing her family again reminding me of all of that we had shared in those passionate days of adolescence and early adulthood.

It didn't seem likely at first glance, but my Jewish background interconnected with M's on a deep personal level. We were both natives of north London or so we thought; scratch the surface and neither of us really fitted into that community. She told me how her parents, active in the African National Congress and in danger of arrest, had smuggled the family out of Johannesburg in the dead of night. As a six-year-old child, she had travelled across the border into Tanzania and made it to the UK. Sixty years earlier my great-grandparents had stood in the shadows of a Belarusian station platform, evading patrolling soldiers looking for Jewish men to conscript into the Tzarist Russian army where a brutal fate awaited them. My 1960s and 70s childhood occurred less than three decades on from the Holocaust and without being aware of it, my identity was born in the chilling afterlife of its horrors.

In the post-war years, the pursuit of justice in the Civil Rights Movement, the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the Women's Movement represented a very real expression of the Biblical injunction from the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy, 'Justice, justice, shall you pursue.' (Stone: Judges, Chapter 16, verse 20) That a society is judged by its treatment of minorities and the vulnerable is a core Jewish principle and Jewish radicals were present in virtually every aspect of the anti-apartheid movement. All the whites charged along with Nelson Mandela in the Rivonia trials of 1963 were Jewish. (www.ethnicradicals.co.za). Baldwin himself believed that Jews and black people 'have a natural alliance based on racial oppression' (Leeming p.51) and some of his closest friends in high school were Jews (Leeming p.27).

The anti-apartheid struggle was *the* pressing political cause in my multicultural London world, played out in parallel with the American civil rights struggle and very immediate to us since London was a centre for exiles. Muswell Hill was an unlikely place

for radicalism but ANC leader Oliver Tambo and his family also lived there in exile in the 1970s and were friends of M's family. (www.sahistory.org.za)

The concept 'The personal is political' (made famous as an essay by Carol Hanisch in 1970 (www.carolhanisch.org) came out of the bubbling second wave of feminism; connections between personal experience and the wider social and political constructs were exploding in the minds and bodies of young people. As we demonstrated against apartheid with thousands of people outside South Africa House in Trafalgar Square we knew we were going to make a difference.

Baldwin knew the Jewish Old Testament well, and had been a child preacher growing up in Harlem as described in his semi-autobiographical novel *Go Tell it On the Mountain* (1953). Baldwin's very personal connection with these texts at a formative age fanned the fire of his demand for justice as a young activist and intellectual. He called on the image of God's reckoning with Noah after the Flood in the conclusion of his famous essay in *The Fire Next Time* published in 1963:

If we do not now dare everything, the fulfilment of that prophecy, re-created from the Bible in song by a slave, is upon us: God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No more water, the fire next time.

Writer Hal Zina Bennett read the novels of William Faulkner as a teenager and says he is 'still guided – perhaps hypnotised – by what I learned from him.' (Bennett, p.129) Reading Baldwin's work was not only consciousness raising for me as a London schoolgirl similarly raised on powerful Bible stories of dispossession, slavery and fearsome predictions, but it was also a masterclass in the transformational power of writing: to reach towards transcendence through creativity, to learn empathy through imagination, to be lifted by the truths of others expressed through narrative.

Having got through all of Baldwin's novels to date, I was immersed in the lives of a dazzlingly wide stage of characters;

musicians, artists, preachers, writers, lovers and enemies. There are also victims of prejudice, exclusion and self-hatred. *Giovanni's Room* is a ground-breaking story revolving around a love triangle between David, his fiancé Hella and his lover Giovanni, set in Paris. They are all white because Baldwin stated he could not deal with the two propositions of race and homosexuality at the same time at that point in his life. (www.newyorker.com). M and I could easily sit up all night discussing these issues recurring in *If Beale Street Could Talk*, *Giovanni's Room* or *Another Country* with an intensity that the characters themselves would certainly have approved of.

I had visited New York as a teenager for my aunt's wedding and had a romantic idea of it as a city and although Baldwin's Harlem was not a world I knew, I instinctively found connections with my own life. That is the art and the great gift of a writer for the human experience is just that: the experience of being human. In Baldwin's novels there is no identity politics; there is emotion and plenty of it: love, hatred, confusion, jealousy, fear and loyalty. There is sex and tenderness in *If Beale Street Could Talk* described by Tish, the young pregnant narrator often in colloquial speech and through flashbacks and reflection. The expressive language and narrative of such impassioned fiction was a far more trusted guide to the world for me than the filter through which teachers at school attempted to shape my perceptions. Creativity was not valued and the transformative power of writing as praxis was certainly not harnessed during my time in mainstream schooling (Yagelski, p. 189). As I see it now, my creative imagination and persistent influences such as Baldwin led me to seek out 'peak experiences that we depend on as writers to give us our most vivid emotions, images, tensions and meaning.' (Bennett, p.117)

Muncey describes metaphor as a useful device for conveying meaning for an autoethnography (Muncey p.9). A metaphor for life writing of this nature must be elemental, I mused but mine was not obvious. Air and water were too amorphous, romantic; they did not contain the fiery passion of youth. The earth too damp, something sad and earnest that I did not connect to for this purpose. Fire was James Baldwin's preserve of course – I

Creative Writing Gets Different

could not appropriate that. So it is that I have often returned to metal and the metaphor of a chain; being a link in a chain of writers, connecting to the past, handing something, however small, on to the future. A chain connotes connection and connection connotes universality and infinity across generations:

'And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to
you.'

(Walt Whitman Song of Myself, Verse I 1892)

JAMES BALDWIN

David Leeming's intimate biography of Baldwin recounts his remarkable life story and also illuminates his courage, personal struggles and immense power to shed light on injustice. Quincy Troupe describes him as 'a superb writer who created an immensely influential and personal language' (Troupe, p. 24). As a teenager I fell headlong into its power and rereading him now, many years later, my adult experience and far deeper understanding of the wider socio-political context in which he wrote attest to the validity of my youthful responses. The 1960s, writes Troupe, put the world on notice and white, black, conservative and liberal alike were incalculably altered (Troupe p.24). By the time Baldwin died in 1987, it became fashionable, according to writer Mel Watkin, to dismiss him as 'outdated and irrelevant'. This is only the case, he argues, if 'an eloquent appeal for probity and human dignity is irrelevant.' (Troupe, p. 123)

Baldwin mines the bedrock of the human soul and does not hold back either linguistically or emotionally. His rich layers of language are a tool to drill down into the strata of emotional meanings, 'without conditions and without distance' (Bakhtin, p. 285), an exposition of the darkness and light, fears and joys of the heart to reveal truths about human experience.

In her essay *Life in his Language* Toni Morrison eloquently describes how Baldwin brought 'at least three gifts' to the reader. The first of these is language: 'You made American English honest

– genuinely international. You exposed its secrets and reshaped it until it was truly modern dialogic, representative, humane. You stripped it of ease and false comfort and fake innocence and evasion and hypocrisy. ... You went into that forbidden territory and decolonized it.' The second gift he shares is courage. Baldwin, Morrison passionately states 'could go as a stranger in the village and transform the distances between people into intimacy with the whole world.' The third of Baldwin's gifts was a tenderness 'so delicate I thought it could not last, but last it did and envelop me it did.' (Troupe p.75-78).

Baldwin wrote extensively on race and racism though he rebuked those who tried to pin him down as either a black writer, a gay writer or a protest writer. In an interview with Village Voice editor Richard Goldstein, he said that he had never fitted into the label of being gay. 'There's nothing in me that is not in everybody else and nothing in everybody else that is not in me.' (Troupe, p.174, p.182). Similarly on race, he passionately challenges the notion of division, saying: 'As long as you think you're white, I'm going to be forced to think I'm black.' (www.jamesbaldwinproject.org)

He became involved in the Civil Rights Movement, the March on Washington and was friends with Martin Luther King sharing a vision of liberation for white as well as black people (Leeming p.228). He visited Africa in 1962 and while he was at first sceptical that he would have anything in common with people he met there, he soon found that the style of the people on the streets of Dakar reminded him of Harlem where he had grown up (Leeming p.208).

In 1948 Baldwin moved to Paris (one of the settings in *Another Country*) as a twenty-four-year-old exile. It was a place he could breathe along with many other African-Americans after World War Two but returned to the US frequently. One of my 'if only' regrets is not having the courage to make a trip to the south of France to seek out an audience at the famed "Welcome Table" at his house in St. Paul de Vence where he later made his permanent home (Leeming p 374).

ANOTHER COUNTRY

Maya Angelou describes the novel *Another Country* as 'about black and white trying to connect, trying to respect each other, trying desperately to love each other.' (www.jamesbaldwinproject.org). Mel Watkins describes the opening section, which focuses on the downward spiral of musician Rufus Scott who commits suicide as 'some of the most wrenchingly moving writing to be found anywhere' about the suffering of urban blacks in late 1950s America (Troupe, p114). A central character in the rest of the book is Ida, Rufus's younger sister who has a complex relationship with Rufus's close friend Vivaldo, an aspiring (white) writer. Not surprisingly, her experiences of racial discrimination and sexism are never far from view. She is protecting herself from the disapproval she knows she will encounter when she refuses to go to a birthday party for Vivaldo's brother. Ida tells her lover: "I'm not interested in the education of your family." (*Another Country*, p.279)

Baldwin wove many incidents from his life into his novels. The final scene in *Another Country* (pp.435-6) when Eric meets his lover Yves arriving in New York, is taken from Baldwin's memory of meeting his on-off lover Lucien Happersberger at the airport in 1954 (Leeming p.99). Eric, although white and southern is his 'most directly autobiographical character and a mouthpiece for Baldwin's feelings about the challenge of artistic expression' (Leeming, p.202).

WHEN I COME HOME

After quitting 'A' levels, I spent a year hitch-hiking around Australia and had written an autobiographical novel about my travels. I then set out to write another book, set on my own wide stage of characters. As Toni Morrison famously said in an interview, 'I wrote my first novel because I wanted to read it.' (www.globalwomenshistory.com) I deliberately adapted a line from Aretha Franklin's 1967 classic crie de coeur *Respect* for the title – *When I Come Home*. M and I were huge fans of soul music and it was a natural tribute to Baldwin to choose this as the title

for my novel, especially as music and the lives of musicians is a major theme in many Baldwin novels.

M had become a nurse and we lived in a commune of seven people: a funky group of artists, students and others. We shared money, ate together, went to concerts and had the best parties in what was jokingly referred to as 'The People's Republic of Islington'. Am I romanticising it all now? We had our arguments and complaints but also a fierce loyalty to each other's dreams. For this part of my research, I have mined my boxes of 'archives': photos, poetry, diaries, and typed manuscripts of novels, all of which are testament to the intense passion and visceral emotions of those years. In *Your Life as Story*, Tristine Rainer argues that the 'diary process of writing spontaneously and rereading allows you to hear your voice, sort of like singing in the shower.' (Rainer, p.125) I may be slightly uncomfortable listening to that untrained voice now, and even though it may argue with my voice in the present, I am grateful to its willingness, courage, and openness to experimentation (Rainer, p.126).

In my novel, incidents from my own experiences also found their way onto the page. Reading the details of those sensations and emotions now, written through an intense poetic lens, I perceived my youth with a vivid clarity that no act of remembering could yield.

In this section, I will explore three recurring themes of Baldwin's that I discovered on re-reading *When I Come Home*: racism, place, and relationships.

RACISM

Baldwin was the first contemporary writer I had read up to then who explored painful subjects without holding back linguistically or emotionally and I felt I had been given permission to do the same. Between 1962 and 1982, racial acceptance had come a long way yet still there was a deep societal bigotry and narrowmindedness in Britain like a layer of glue that could not be scraped off people's consciousness. I knew because I had experienced it as a Jew.

Creative Writing Gets Different

The character of Freeia in *When I Come Home* was based very much on M. They were both nurses at a local hospital. They were both proud black women in their mid-twenties with somewhat feckless younger white boys as lovers. They both had a gay man as a close friend, were both very political and had come from political families: M's in South Africa. Freeia's mother was active in SWAPO, the Namibian liberation movement.

M often experienced racism and sexism from both black and white men as did Freeia in this extract. I wrote this scene based on a real life incident as narrated to me by M. Freeia is waiting at a bus stop after an evening out with a friend. Two Rasta men start to harass her, accusing her of having a white boyfriend and eventually walk off after engaging in threatening and intimidating behaviour towards her. A few moments later, a drunk white man approaches her and starts making racist and sexist comments.

'Hello, love!' he called brashly, stripping her naked with a single glance. Her coat was well-buttoned, she wasn't wearing high heels, everything about her appearance was perfectly discreet. WHY ME? She ignored the sarcastic slobbering voice and turned to face the direction of the empty bus lane. 'What's the matter with you, eh? I said hello. Proud little jungle bunny aren't ya?' He leaned towards her and grabbed her sleeve. 'Eh? Eh?' he repeated when Freeia still gave no answer. (p.110)

The scene continues with Freeia being pinned against the wall and punched by the drunk man.

Tears poured down her face, tinged with blood. Still no one came to Freeia's aid. A few men of the same age group started to laugh. One called out, 'That's right, put 'er in 'er place, mate!' Another, irritated by the disturbance complained just distantly, 'Leave it out, mate!'

'Filthy black bitch!' the drunk kept shouting, waving his arms in the air, staggering up and down on the shop doorstep as he watched Freeia look frantically for a taxi. (p.111)

Whereas young people in my circle of all backgrounds had very close friendships in the melting pot that was London, there was still a pervading racism and harassment in the wider world that spilled out as described in Freeia's thoughts in the novel, 'like dirty water from a sink.' Language is not merely descriptive; it reflects the forces within a culture, how it is constructed and what it will and will not tolerate.

In his linguistic theory of speech acts (1955), J.L Austin argues that words are performative. The illocutionary force of an utterance is what the speaker attempts to *do* with it. The perlocutionary effect is the result of that attempt and its effect on the interlocutor (Austin Lectures). In the case of a racist insult the performative effect is very clear and intentional. Language reflects social change and mirrors our evolving ideation and tolerances. Whereas some racist expressions I used in my novel would be bowdlerised nowadays because the vocabulary we use now is far more carefully monitored, they had been commonplace enough when I grew up. In *Another Country*, Baldwin himself uses terms that are no longer acceptable for black and gay people referring to 'niggers' and 'fairies' (pp. 262-263). His use of such marked terms does not connote approval but is a powerful 'show not tell' of society's casual bigotry.

PLACE: PARIS AND LONDON

I was fortunate to have visited Paris regularly since I was 11 and had lived with my penfriend Christina's family twice a year in the school holidays, learning French and exploring the city. Later, I continued my love affair with Paris which now included tracing the steps of artists and writers from previous generations: I stood outside the famous bookshop Shakespeare and Co, breathed in the unique rubber smell that can only ever be the Paris Metro, tripping lightly up the steps under the art nouveau sign of Saint

Creative Writing Gets Different

Germain dreaming of becoming a link in the chain. Early in the morning on New Year's Day 1980, I sat on a bench in the Tuileries Gardens breathing in the beauty of the bare trees after an all-night party with some Parisian students I would never see again.

In this scene one of the protagonists of the novel, Paul, has gone to Paris after a break-up with his long-term girlfriend Kelly. It includes introspection and the relationship we have with the streets of a city. Paul is, heading for the metro in search of a bar to spend New Year's Eve:

... he dug his hands deeper into his pockets and continued his walk to the metro station. There his night's adventures would feel within reach – walking along the street to Gare D'Austerlitz he still felt anonymous – one of the grey masses. His identity would turn to colour when he entered into dialogue with the city and its people. (p. 42)

While writing, I worked at night in a wine bar in Covent Garden. It was our substitute Greenwich Village though by the early 80s far more yuppie than bohemian or intellectual. Reading of Baldwin's youth in Greenwich Village when he first left home and his struggles with love and loss, I have a new perspective on his writing as I reread my own. I see the organic processes of an aspiring writer as a universal experience – urgent questions of identity, belonging, sexuality, finding love and a place in the world are common to young people everywhere.

The gay nightclub 'Heaven' in Charing Cross has been recreated in the recent BBC TV series *It's a Sin* by Russell T Davies and according to one review 'gave eighties London its beating heart' (www.telegraph.co.uk) In one chapter of *When I Come Home*, I described Freeia's birthday party held there on a Tuesday Women's Night where:

a strange odour of desire and masculine sweat, mascara and perfume mingled, tight dresses and tight trousers ... each locked in their own fantasy

... with one thing in common – the element of escape – a weapon which united them in a battle against the harsh realities of the world outside. To others perhaps the place was a vision of hell and not heaven – (p.160)

Another Country is full of descriptions of bars, clubs, sexual encounters laced with disappointment, conflict and passion. Eighties London did not seem so different and I wanted to capture some of those moments in my own writing.

RELATIONSHIPS

Another Country is all about relationships, platonic and sexual between men, between men and women. It is about betrayal and the yearning for truthfulness. Baldwin often uses the metaphor of music to unlock what is unsayable in words. In the feminist linguistics classic *That's Not What I meant!* Deborah Tannen describes the 'duality that reflects the human condition' – wanting to be close so we do not feel alone yet at the same time not wanting to be engulfed (Tannen, p.15). In this framing, communication is inherently difficult and none more so than between men and women who have different conversational styles. Words may convey information, but says, Tannen, we negotiate what we mean in metamesages that are often non-verbal (Tannen, p.26).

In this scene in *When I Come Home*, Freeia's lover Nick, an artist, reveals his painting of her for the first time. When communicating they often argue and misunderstand each other for complex reasons of difference. She looks at the image of herself on the canvas and sees a metaphor of their relationship in which they are unable to verbally communicate their true feelings::

She felt the intimacy was all locked away inside the painting now and that it somehow couldn't be recovered; maybe by concealing her blush in each drop of oily blue and brown and red colour he had used, he protected himself from the awesomeness of the feelings they had shared. (p.173)

CONCLUSION

Embarking on this research question about how James Baldwin influenced me as an inspiring writer, I have dug deep to engage with the widest possible collection of sources from philosophy to psychology, from feminism to politics, from song lyrics to religious teachings. A diverse shelf to be sure but one that reflects my personal eclectic history as well as honouring Baldwin's unique gifts, values and literary legacy. One question I asked at the outset was how I could truthfully examine my youthful ambition and creative writing? By looking into the text itself, I put myself within touching distance of the significant and luminous emotions that connect my past with the present. I have reappraised whether those ideas and emotions really were transformative and still valid as components of my identity as I had long believed. What I learned from Baldwin was to identify as a writer and to be what novelist Elif Shafak calls a global soul with 'a multitude of belongings' (Shafak p. 44). She also appeals to the reader that they should not be afraid of complexity (Shafak p.89). A plea with which Baldwin would undoubtedly concur.

In the current culture storms over identity, I have been speculating as to what Baldwin would have to say on the question. His characters are from every possible background, he honestly writes about people from every angle. Shafak addresses this contentious issue in her Ted Talk *The Politics of Fiction* when she says that 'identity politics divides us, fiction connects. ... Identity politics is made of solid bricks. Fiction is flowing water.' (Shafak, 2010 14m 21 secs) and I think Baldwin would agree. The only intersectionality he would have been interested in is where creativity and writing meet justice at the crossroads of love because as he so lyrically elucidates:

The moment we cease to hold each other, the
moment we break faith with each other, the sea
engulfs us and the light goes out.

(Leeming, p.227)

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A PLACE OF BELONGING: ASYA KARDZHALIYSKA

HOW WORKSHOPS ON THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE
CAN BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER

SHORT STORY ONE: THE BEGINNING

‘Where’s mum?’ I asked, tugging on my auntie’s shirt sleeve. We were in our small, narrow kitchen, no bigger than a cramped corridor. The washing machine roared angrily, as it shook and vibrated our clothes around.

‘She’s in England.’ She responded calmly, continuing with her task. I couldn’t see what it was, I was much too short. I was standing in front of our lowest cabinet. It was missing a door, so someone had attached a little bit of fabric, like a makeshift curtain. I knew what was in there. Washing detergent and measuring cups, all stacked on top of one another.

‘What’s England?’

‘It’s another country.’

‘Where is it?’

‘Oh, quite a way away. It’s across the sea.’

I stopped then and thought about it. I remember distinctly wondering what a different country was. I tried to conjure up an image, but nothing came. I didn’t know anything about England. I imagined it might be sort of exotic. A new place. A different country. How odd.

‘Will she visit soon?’ I piped up again. I tried to imagine my mum in a different country, walking around in a sea of people who might not look like her. I imagined lots of open spaces, but I couldn’t think of what the buildings would look like or anything.

‘I don’t know. It’s quite expensive to visit. I imagine she’ll be back when she can.’ My aunt, ever the picture of patience answered.

‘Oh.’ I thought for a moment, though I couldn’t remember what I was thinking about.

‘Will we ever see England?’

She sighed then, long and hard, and I wondered if she might be tired.

‘Yes. She wants to take you to live there someday. With her.’

‘When will that be?’ I remember being much less excited to see my mum, and much more excited to see a different country. It was an adventure. I couldn’t stop wondering about what sort of place it might be.

‘I don’t know. Soon, I expect.’ It felt like a firework had exploded in my chest. We might go to live in England. It sounded so fancy.

I didn’t miss my mum, not really. I didn’t really remember enough of her to miss her. I knew she was away, and I didn’t mind that she wasn’t here. I had Auntie, and my big sister. Of course, it was lovely when she visited, but it was never very often or for very long. Even now, being all grown up, when I tell people I lived a chunk of my childhood without my mother, they pity me. They coo and aww about how hard it must have been without her. But I don’t remember it being difficult, because I didn’t really remember her. Back then, she was like a stranger to me. A dark-haired stranger with red lipstick and skirts with smart tops, who carried a briefcase and smelled nice. It was always the hardest when she left. There was a sweater in the wardrobe that still smelled like her perfume. Right after she would leave, I would go to the wardrobe, open the door and get the waft. I was careful not to touch it, because I was scared it would stop smelling like her.

SHORT STORY TWO: THE MIDDLE

It was a strange sensation, growing up in England, but not quite. I didn’t know cartoons like ‘Postman Pat’, but I knew ‘Basil Brush’, yet my lack of knowledge of these pop cultural icons felt like a test. An aptitude test of how ‘British’ I truly was. And if I failed, then I would lose the gold star of participation that I had worked so hard to earn. Unlike my classmates, I didn’t live and breathe British culture, but I also didn’t feel a deep connection to my Bulgarian roots either. In a sense, I felt like I didn’t quite belong in either world, I was on the fringes, a no man’s land, where it

often felt like I was the only one there, a country where I was the lone passport holder.

I was in a history class, and I loved history. I loved my eccentric teacher who had a tattoo of a devil on his arm, and I loved learning about civilisations that grew and crumbled. It was a warm spring day when the government worker showed up in the classroom. She asked for me by name, and confused and bewildered, I trailed out of the classroom with her. She told me to bring a copy of the textbook. We walked down the hall to the library, where the sound was muffled. She sat me down at a table.

‘I’m here to help children whose first language isn’t English. You aren’t the only person I’m seeing.’

I didn’t say anything, I didn’t want to. I was pining to be back in the classroom. I was sure that everyone already thought I was the weird foreign girl, I didn’t want them to think that I needed more help. I had worked so hard to prove that I was just as capable as my peers, and this woman was stripping it all away with a couple of sentences.

‘Were you just in history?’ she asked me, in what I’m sure was meant to be a gentle voice. I didn’t want to look at her face, so I focused on her blue lanyard instead.

‘Yeah.’

‘Can you tell me a little about what you’re learning?’

‘Nazi Germany.’

‘Can you tell me what this paragraph says here?’ she asked.

I read out the paragraph she indicated, feeling shame and embarrassment well in me like a balloon about to burst. It wasn’t fair. Why was she here?

‘OK,’ she said once I was finished.

‘Do you need any help?’ she asked me, pointing to the worksheet she’d also told me to bring. Her tone was so sickly sweet and patronising.

‘No.’

‘And do you understand all the words and work? You don’t feel like you’re struggling?’

‘No.’

She nodded.

‘OK then. Let’s get you back to your lesson. Thank you for seeing me.’ It wasn’t as though I really had any sort of choice. I was angry with her. Angry with her for wasting my time, angry at her for pulling me from my lesson, and angry that I couldn’t seem to shake the label of ‘foreigner’ no matter what I did. It didn’t matter that I was in top set English; it didn’t matter that I consistently got high grades for my essays, as far as she was concerned, I would always be an ‘other’. Someone who needed to be pitied, someone who needed more help because of where I was born.

By the time I got home that day, I had put cement over what I had decided to dub ‘the history incident’. I was standing by the kitchen counter, keeping my mum company as she prepped dinner and as I was giving her a detailed breakdown of who said what to whom, I stopped. I had gotten to the ‘history incident’. I wasn’t sure if I wanted to tell her. The worker had made me feel as though I had done something wrong. I felt ashamed that she had needed to see me. If only I had worked harder or read the paragraph better, maybe she wouldn’t have bothered me.

‘There was a woman who pulled me out of history today.’

‘Oh?’

‘I didn’t get in trouble or anything. She said that she was going around to speak to everyone whose first language isn’t English. She wanted to make sure I wasn’t struggling with the work.’

My mum tutted so aggressively that I took step back, afraid that I had done something wrong. Anger was written into every wrinkle on her face. She didn’t often get mad, but when she did, it was like seeing a bull in a china shop.

‘Did-did I do something wrong?’

‘I’m not angry with you. I’m angry with them. Who did she think she was? You’ve been here so long that English is your first language!’ she exclaimed, and I was surprised I couldn’t see smoke coming out of her nostrils.

Relieved, I took a step closer to her again.

‘Do you want me to write to the school? Complain?’

‘No!’ I said, far too quickly. The last thing I wanted was for my mum to march up into school, complaint letter in hand and scream at the poor receptionist.

She pursed her lips. ‘Alright.’

SHORT STORY THREE: THE END

The day that I got into university, my family and I went out to a celebratory breakfast at Wetherspoons. We ordered pancakes, and coffee and full English breakfasts; and I couldn't remember a time before or since that the mood felt so light and airy. We drank our coffee and ate our food, but I don't remember being asked how I felt. It was a given that I would be excited. But I felt apprehensive. I worried that nobody would like me, that I wouldn't fit in, that my skill level wouldn't be the same as my peers – that they would have had advantages that I, with a working-class immigrant mother, simply couldn't have afforded.

The day I moved into my Halls was sticky with anxiety. It was a warm autumn afternoon, and what sticks out in my mind is the student helper commenting on how little belongings I'd brought. I felt flustered, should I have brought more? Why didn't I own more things? Was I over or under prepared? When my family left the following morning, I didn't feel relief and I didn't feel like the world was my oyster. I felt nauseous at the thought of meeting my flatmates.

Growing up, I had often felt ashamed of my status, and it didn't matter that my passport was legally labelled as a 'British Citizen', I felt as though I was a faker. I often wished that I had come from a 'cooler' country, somewhere exotic like Spain – somewhere that when I mentioned it, people didn't scratch their heads in confusion because they'd never heard of it. Even though almost everyone on my course was British in every sense of the word, it didn't matter to them that I wasn't. Whenever I pulled the immigrant card as a joke; I would get chided that I belonged here just as much as my friend from Bristol did. I felt accepted on a level that I never had before. To them, it didn't matter that I wasn't born here, and they never asked me embarrassing questions about my family or my ability to function as a member of society. And it certainly didn't matter to my lecturers, who treated me just as fairly as my British born counterparts; it didn't matter to them because I had earned my place on the course, fair and square.

The day I realised I belonged was during a lecture in my first term. My seminar group was sat in a semi-circle, and I read out

my piece of life writing. I don't remember what the lecturer said. The girl after me was an international Swedish student; and when she read her work – my rotund spiky haired Canadian professor commented on the proficiency of her English. It's strange to admit, but I felt disappointed of all things that my English wasn't worth commenting on. At every stage at school, I had had at least one teacher comment on how well I spoke and wrote English; to the point where it felt as though it had become a part of my personality. A shiny sticker that proclaimed I was better than the other supposed job stealing immigrants. But thinking about it now, it was probably the highest compliment he could have given me. There was no need to focus on my English skills because they were on par with my peers.

WORKSHOP SEGMENTS & ACADEMIC COMMENTARY

WORKSHOP ONE

Introduction/Outline

The aim of these series of workshops is to create an open discussion around the immigrant experience. It will be a series of three workshops, each focussing on a different element of moving countries or starting a new life. It will be aimed at older teenagers, aged between sixteen and eighteen, as I believe that they would be the best audience for a workshop like this. There will be a beginning, a middle and end of the workshops, with the last workshop session focussing on the integration of an immigrant. I aim to create an honest and open environment where any questions and misconceptions can be answered and brought up, and the teenagers involved can make their own definitions on what it means to be an immigrant, but more importantly what it means to belong as I am aware that not everyone attending would come from a migrant background. I would like for these workshops to be perhaps an hour long, as it would provide ample time for discussion and activities; however, I believe it being longer than this would prove to be exhausting as the subject matter at hand can be quite dense and sensitive and I would like to remain aware of the needs of the participants. At the beginning

of each workshop, I will read a short story that I have written to establish the theme for the workshop and give the participants my own immigration story.

WORKSHOP ONE: THE BEGINNING

Activity One: Collage of 'Home' (20 minutes)

With these workshops I aim to utilise the social constructivism style of teaching, as I believe it will be the most effective (Vygotsky, 1963). I believe this will make my workshops more engaging for the participants as the theory of social constructivism believes that learning is a collaborative, shared process. As the aim of this workshop is to educate young people on the immigrant experience and shift any preconceived notions, I believe that my role as a teacher is best suited to that of social constructivism. One of the roles of the teacher is defined thus:

The teacher makes sure she/he understands the students' pre-existing conceptions, and guides the activity to address them and then build on them. (Oliver, 2000).

I would like for these workshops to be an experience of self-reflection as the participants will learn and explore what it means to belong somewhere. As a lot of these tasks are creative and somewhat open ended, I believe that my role as a teacher is described as, '[...] learning is shared and responsibility for the instruction is shared [...]' (Tam, 2000). I believe that in order for a workshop like this to be a success, it is vital that a healthy and trusting relationship is built between myself and the participants as for then they will feel safer to share their thoughts. I have already mentioned the importance of group discussions within these activities, as it will be imperative for the students to engage with their pre-existing notions, be that of what it means to belong or of their knowledge of immigration in order to broaden their scopes and listen to differing viewpoints (Oliver, 2000).

To do this, the first activity will be to make a mood board or a collage using old magazines (that I will provide) of items, words, or pictures of what reminds them of home, or anything that

Creative Writing Gets Different

would be a comforting presence. After the time is up, they will be free to share with the rest of the group. By doing so, the participants will be able to see their environment and surroundings in a new light, as we can often take for granted things and items we see in our everyday lives. Along with this, I am hoping to let the participants see that even if they are from the country they were born in, there is still beauty and diversity to be found in their own unique routines; by this, I would be hoping to underline the importance of diversity and how those who are different from us are not as 'foreign' as we might think.

I hope that this activity will make the participants think and reflect upon what it is about their home that makes it feel homely or familiar. I believe that self-reflection will be a pivotal part of these workshops as I want to explore how someone might be able to find a home in an unlikely place.

Activity Two: The Parents (15 minutes)

This will be a creative writing activity. Throughout the workshops I hope to have a variety of tasks, some based on creative writing and some not. I hope that this will make the workshop more interactive and varied. The participants will work in small groups, no more than three or four per group and they will devise either a list, or a short story from a parent's perspective who has had to leave their country of origin, but either cannot take their children with them or will come back for them later. Though I will be explaining the tasks to the participants, it will be up to them and their groups to choose how they will interpret the activity. By giving them the idea, or the outline of what's expected of them, I believe that the students will gain a greater understanding of what the activity is composed of and will therefore make them more engaged for the rest of the workshops. (Preszler, 2009).

I would like this to be a collaborative effort as the participants will have different ideas as to why people choose to immigrate. In the explanation I will make a point to establish the difference between immigration and being a refugee. By doing this, especially collaboratively, I am hoping that the participants will have a

chance to reflect not only on their upbringings but on the choices that parents make to ensure that their children have better opportunities than they did.

Activity Three: Closing Thoughts (25 minutes)

This last activity will be a discussion of how they found the first session. I believe this to be important so that the participants also feel valued, and it will establish a more comfortable atmosphere as they wouldn't necessarily feel as though they were in class. If they would so like, they may provide feedback or ideas on the activities they've just done, and dependent on that feedback the activities will be changed or tweaked. I hope that the discussion will also cover what they feel they have learned over the course of the hour, and if there is anything more specific, they would like to look at for the following meeting. In this sense, the workshops will be shaped by the participants as they will be able to see themselves in them. I believe this will be imperative to the success of the workshop as it will allow the students a chance to have their ideas and voices heard, as this may not be the case in their ordinary classrooms and lessons, and ultimately, the goal of these workshops is to make the participants feel heard and valued.

Moreover, teens are filled with insights and critiques of the current state of writing instruction as well as ideas about how to make in-school writing instruction better and more useful. (Lenhart, et al, 2008).

WORKSHOP TWO: THE MIDDLE

I opted to showcase this short story, or snippet as a way to show that even when immigrants feel as though they're settled, they are still viewed as 'others'. I think this is important to show not only because it is a problem often faced by migrants, who often feel alone and isolated because of the culture shock of moving to a different country. Though this is certainly not the only reasoning, it could perhaps be the most prevalent, and it is because of this precedency, especially when it comes to my own experiences that I feel this emotion and experience is important to explore in my workshop sessions. Though the participants of these sessions may not be migrants themselves, I wish to bring

Creative Writing Gets Different

the participants closer together as feelings of loneliness and isolation are not just felt by immigrants. As the bonds and friendships that are formed throughout adolescence are hugely important, I hope that these workshops will be able to let the participants become closer to one another and become more empathetic to their individual struggles, regardless of their background. I further believe this is important because: 'Indeed, adolescents are markedly more sensitive to peer acceptance, rejection and approval than are children or adults.' (Orben, Tomova, Blakemore, 2020).

Activity One: Feeling Foreign (25 minutes)

This activity will be a solo creative writing exercise. I will ask the participants to draw upon their own life experiences and write about a time in which they felt 'foreign' or 'excluded.' To make it more approachable, the exercise can be about any time that the participant felt isolated. To ensure that all participants are feeling engaged or if they do not feel comfortable writing, if they do not wish to write, then they can use pictures or draw a comic of said time. After the time is up, they can share what they have with the group, or if they themselves would not feel comfortable sharing, then they can ask someone else to share their work for them. By doing so, I believe that the atmosphere will be more welcoming and will encourage participants to share as they won't feel pressured into doing anything that they might not want to do. During these activities, I shall be mindful of the level of writing and literacy by the participants, as not everyone will be at the same level. In order to make it engaging for everyone involved, if they are feeling particularly stuck, they can discuss the activity in small groups without writing anything down, and this will hopefully allow them to not feel pressured to write a masterpiece (Morrissey, N.D.).

Activity Two: Hot Seat (30 minutes)

The participants will break off into groups of four, and they will volunteer someone to participate in the 'Hot Seat'. They will have a small period of time to provide questions for the 'immigrant'. The questioners will be ordinary people that are fascinated by the 'otherness' of the 'immigrant'. The person in the Hot Seat will

then try and imagine that they are an immigrant that has spent a significant chunk of their life in the UK and will answer the questions accordingly. I believe that through this activity, the students will have a more solid grasp of what it feels like to be an immigrant and using their imagination would be able to empathise more as they will be able to think of how they would feel and react during the questioning period.

Afifah (2020) summarises some of the key benefits for hot seating, as it encourages their cooperation and negotiation and that the students who are sitting in the hot seat are allowed to make their own decisions, independent of the teacher present.

As I want to have a mixture of individual writing exercises and group exercises, I believe that a hot seat type of activity will not only be more engaging to the participants as they will have a chance to speak to one another and collaborate but will also be given a chance to expand on their language skills in a way that isn't strictly paired with their writing skills. I also believe that giving them a chance to work together on these tasks will engage them in a more fulfilling way as they will, in essence be learning from each other.

'In order to feel empathy for somebody else, it is necessary to appreciate the nature of their minds and emotions.' (Mercer, 2016). I believe that through this imaginative discourse, the students will have to imagine a situation that could feel foreign to them, and by doing this, I hope that they will feel more empathetic to those that have different lived experiences.

WORKSHOP THREE: THE END

Activity One: A Happy Memory (15 minutes)

This will be a creative writing exercise. I am hoping to piggyback this off the activity from workshop two where the participants wrote about times and experiences when they felt excluded. This activity will involve the students writing about a happy time or memory in their lives, but more specifically it will be a time when they felt as though they were home. It doesn't matter if they're describing a physical location or a sensation, I want to encourage them to think about and reflect on their lives and how the

prospect of home is not necessarily defined as a house but could be a group of people or a time when they felt as though they belonged. Once more, they will be welcome to share with the rest of the group. The participants will be welcome to comment on what they liked, or thought worked well within the shared work, or things that they weren't quite sure about. Wallace-Segall (2012) states in her article for "The Atlantic" that human beings "[...] yearn to share, reflect and understand one another, [...]". By having an activity that makes the students reflect on a bad memory and pairing that with an activity that then allows them to reflect on a good memory, it allows them to process all scopes of their emotions and by writing it all out, I hope that it will give them a chance to explore their vocabulary and be able to use those skills as they continue on their academic journeys. I believe it is especially important to give them a chance to not share their work as it allows them to work in a pressure free environment where they can fully explore their memories and make sense of them.

Activity Two: Feeling Home (15 minutes)

This will be conjoined with the previous activity in terms of themes. However, this will be a drawing activity where the participants draw their ideal 'home'. It can be a living room, or a bedroom, any space that would make them feel safe and wanted. I believe this can be useful, as again, the students will be thinking outside the box and reflecting on what it is that makes things feel like home or otherwise. Throughout these workshops' sessions, I am hoping to encourage the participants to find a sense of belonging and explore their own identity. Workshops are essential, especially when it comes to participants with mental health issues, as the activities give them a chance to create an identity outside of their illness (Slattery, et al, 2020). Though these workshops are not necessarily designed for people that are immigrants and are more of a learning experience for native citizens, I am hoping to expand on Slattery's point by having any migrants that might be attending have a chance to think about their identity outside of the labels that would be presented to them by their fellow peers or even teachers; thus, giving them a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Activity Three: Final Reflection (30 minutes)

As this will be the last activity of the workshop, I would like for it to be a collaborative effort amongst the participants. As such, it will be closing thoughts on the workshop in the form of a group discussion. I am hoping that through the activities in the workshop it will foster and encourage a varied discussion about what they have learned through this experience, what activities they found interesting, and if the workshop should be repeated, and if that happens, what they think should be changed. In this sense, I would want them to feel as though they are also in charge of what happens during the workshop and will therefore have a reciprocal teaching type of atmosphere. It will also be an opportunity for them to ask any questions that they didn't feel got covered through the activities. I would want for this discussion regarding feedback to be informal as I would want these workshops to feel different to the participants than a regular class. However, I recognise that this will be a challenge as some students may be used to immediate feedback on their work (Matthew, 2020) and would not want to put them in a situation where they could feel demoralised.

CONCLUSION

Going into this project, my aim was to educate the participants on the immigrant experience and enable them to learn about a topic that could be otherwise difficult to be educated on; as there is a lot of available information and it could become easy to be misinformed. However, as I planned out the workshops, I discovered that the activities I had planned worked much better to encourage the students to work collaboratively and as I would wish for them to learn from each other, as opposed to learning from myself; the activities became much more relevant for them exploring their own emotions and developing a sense of empathy for other people's lived experiences. I believe this is important as though I would like for the participants to feel as though they gained new skills, my ultimate goal would be for them to feel as though they now have a greater understanding not only of their own emotions, but of the emotions of their peers, thus creating a warmer and more caring environment.

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THE TALE OF THREE SISTERS: SARAH KINGDON

CREATIVE PIECE

In a far-off land in a time long ago lived a woman. She was poor but fair of face and full of grace and so it came to pass that she had many suitors. She chose a man who was a fisherman and had many good qualities besides and soon they were to be married. Life would at last begin for her.

Just before the wedding took place, the woman was going about her daily tasks. Now the sun had been shining fiercely for weeks and not a drop of rain had been seen. Finding the usual village well to be dry, she readied herself to walk to the neighbouring village and perhaps find some water there.

Meanwhile, a powerful demon, who could shape shift and fly and perform other magical acts besides, was hot and bothered from the heat. Coming upon the well he thought 'Let me stay in this well for a while, its waters will cool me and I can gather my strength for I am weary. I will find someone to feed me for I simply need to rest.' And with that he changed his shape and became a water serpent and he slithered his way down the well. Cooled by the pleasant water the demon gently fell asleep.

Wearily in the heat, the woman walked the extra miles to the next village and found the well. 'Let me see if there is water here,' she thought. 'I will find a pebble and throw it down, to see if I hear a splash.' And so she looked around and quickly came upon a large stone. The woman leant over the well and let the stone drop down the centre of the well.

To her pleasure she heard the water splash as the pebble landed and she began to wind down her bucket to reach the cool depths below. To her surprise as the bucket reached the water's surface she heard a big booming cry. 'Who dares to wake me as I sleep away my weariness?'

Confused, the woman, thinking she had imagined the voice, continued to lower her bucket. And then came the cry 'Who dares wake me from my sleep and then refuses to answer?'

Now she was certain she had heard it and called back, 'I am just a woman from a village nearby. Our well is dried up so I came here. What are you that dwells in water and speaks so?'

Angrily the demon replied, 'I am this and I am that. You have woken me rudely woman, with a stone that hit me. If you do what I say I will spare you but if you disobey you will be cursed and your children will be cursed.'

The woman though fair and full of grace was not the brightest. Instead of fear she felt bravado and upon filling her pail began pulling line and bucket back.

'Woman who dares to ignore me!' shouted the demon. 'I am tired now but I shall rest and become strong again, then you will fear me! If you do not bring me fine cuts of meat to eat in the next three days, I shall lay a curse upon you and your offspring. You will know the true meaning of despair!'

The woman satisfied with her bucket and eager to return home to rest, turned from the well and began her steps back to her own village. Thinking of what she had heard she angrily muttered 'Fine cuts of meat for a voice with no body! Indeed, when was the last time I had a fine cut of meat?' Pondering this question she returned home, bitterly concluding that she could not recall when she last ate such fare.

Still no rain, so the next day she returned to the other well to fill her bucket and again the voice threatened her. Again she ignored it, and so the following day and the day after that.

Returning on the third day with no meat for the demon, the voice boomed up at her. 'Woman that chose to ignore me! You have refused to obey me and didn't bring meat on the three days that I asked. I have eaten meats bought by other villagers with more sense than you and now my powers have returned!' And with that the demon shape shifted and turned into an eagle which flew to the top of the well and perched on the rim. Wishing to really scare the woman he changed again and this time sat facing her as a fierce dragon and blew flames which shot past her and singed her eyelashes.

'I gave you the chance to appease me but you chose to ignore me.' He roared with smoke trailing from his nostrils. 'I therefore lay upon you the following curse.' The woman trembled fearfully and felt woe as she had never felt before.

‘You will bare three daughters and none shall be married as they will lack the attributes that attracts a husband. You will age quickly and your husband will discard you. You will die poor with no grandsons to support you and your daughters. Now get out of my sight woman!’ He shot flames so near she felt her feet burn and she turned and fled.

And it came to pass that she married. She had three daughters with whom she could not bond as she found them useless. She aged viciously overnight and when she saw herself in the mirror her reflection revealed an old and wrinkled hag. Her husband fearfully fled for he had no desire to be married to such a wretch and was fed up with his daughters as they possessed no charms. Impoverished and with no hope of finding another husband, the woman grew weak and died of a broken heart.

The woman’s daughters grew up. Tending a vegetable patch, they barely managed to survive, but with pity shown by their neighbours the three sisters scraped by. No suitors were ever to visit for word had spread of their lack of charms and peculiar ways.

The first-born daughter was full of fear and scared of her own shadow. Her voice when she spoke was high and shrill as the panic inside her raged constantly. Her life was a living nightmare. The second born saw fault in everything and so complained incessantly. Any job that needed doing was three times harder for her to complete as she battled with the urge of seeing it pointless. The third born was constantly tired, she longed for sleep at all hours of the day and was often to be found slumbering by the vegetable patch. Sleep afforded her numbness from the daily struggles of her life.

And oh! How unhappy the three sisters were! ‘We’re going to die!’ shrilled the first born.

‘What’s the use in living?’ bitterly spat out the second, whilst the youngest gently snored on the kitchen floor.

And so they went on, cursed and bound together only through necessity, with no other options for their wretched souls.

Meanwhile, in a faraway place, on the edges of a deep forest, lived a witch. Feared and respected equally by the local villagers, she had been known to heal the sick with her lotions and potions, but inspired awe and terror from sightings of her oft flying

through the sky in her magic cauldron. The villagers let her be for she was an asset when sickness was upon them.

This witch had woken wearily on a frost-bitten morning, for her dream had tired her so vivid and unpleasant it had been. She had dreamt of the three sisters standing together, screaming but omitting no audible sound. Each one was choking on their own hair which went into their mouths and twisted tight around their tonsils. Choking and soundlessly screaming this image went on and on incessantly plaguing the witch's mind.

She awoke the next day and thought it strange and annoying that she had experienced the same dream again.

On the following morning finding she had dreamt this for a third time she knew something had to be done. 'Rats,' grumbled the witch for she had a list of jobs that needed completion before the next full moon. But she knew she had to do something to help these sisters, she felt deep in her gut that they were imprisoned by a curse.

She wrapped herself in her cloak and oiled her cauldron whilst whispering incantations, the magic would take her to where she needed to be. She waited until the sun had set and then sitting snugly in her cauldron flew off towards the sisters' village. Upon landing she knew immediately she had found the sisters' home, a slanted and ramshackle cottage, with a miserable thin plume of smoke spilling out of the chimney and a weedy looking vegetable patch.

She knocked boldly on the weather-beaten door. The second born yanked the door open and seeing the old woman harshly exclaimed 'What business have you knocking on our door at this time? A stranger!'

'A stranger!' cried the first born from within.

'I beg of you allow a weary traveller a night's sleep by the hearth, I will work for you in the morrow, whatever you wish me to do.'

'We have little food to give you, we have cabbage soup and only enough for us three.' Complained the second born.

'Here, take this!' And the witch reached into her sack and pulled out a large juicy steak. The second born, having never seen such a big succulent piece of meat began to salivate, then took hold of the proffered grub whilst opening the door for the witch.

Once they had eaten the witch laid down by the hearth on the stone floor. She used her cloak as pillow and blanket and slept soundly.

The sun rose and all four converged in the kitchen. 'I had such a queer dream!' quivered the first born.

'So did I!' complained the second.

'As did I,' wearily said the third. The dream had told the story of their mother's fate with the demon,

'We're cursed!' exclaimed the first born,

'Doomed,' lamented the second,

'Fated,, yawned the third.

'What if I was to tell you that the curse which has befallen you could be broken?' said the witch with confidence.

'How?' said the third born fighting to keep her drooping eyelids open.

'How about I show you? Come with me,' commanded the witch. From the witch's authority came surety. This assured purpose, with the previous night's revelation, kindled a tiny flicker of shared hope amongst the three that they had never known before.

They followed the witch to the garden and stood before the witch's cauldron surprised and curious. The witch took out a bottle and rubbed oil all over the cauldron whilst muttering an incantation and the cauldron began to shake violently and then tripled in size. 'Hop in!' cried the witch, delighted with her spell. The three sisters obeyed tentatively and once the witch had joined them they sped off high above the trees, mingling with the clouds, the sister's awe struck and terrified, desperate to be on safe ground again.

Presently below a deep forest emerged and the witch brought the cauldron down to the edge of these woods. Standing on safe earth again the sisters hugged. 'This is the demon's forest. It is encased with magic and none have been through it before. The trees will grab you, the wild beasts are deadly and the journey will take a day and a night. If you break through to the other side, the demon's powers will be diminished, the curse will be lifted and you will be free! I have for each of you a magic tool to help you in this feat.' Reaching into her sack she brought out a fine and shining silver sword. 'Take this,' she told the first born 'and you

will be the defender, the sword is sharp beyond compare and offers strength, you will use this to stay untangled and fight the beasts.' The first born shook as she took hold of the weapon shutting her eyes when she saw her own frightened face reflecting back at her. 'And for you this!' she told the second and brought out a small glass bottle filled with a potion. 'You must be the strength of the group – always encouraging. This potion made of herbs and barks will help to keep you going onward.' And the second born took it uneasily clamping shut her mouth from uttering criticism. 'And lastly for you,!' Facing the third born, the witch revealed a huge stick with rags entwined at its top. Brandishing the stick aloft the rags immediately combusted into flames. 'You will be the watcher and protector, you must stay awake and ensure the fire stays lit – if you fall asleep the fire will die. You will need this fire to deter the beasts and to light your way through the forest at night.' The third born shook herself and taking a deep breath accepted the fire stick.

And so the three sisters began their quest and stepped into the malevolent forest. Darkness surrounded them and the third born lit the way. Immediately creepers began to ensnare them but the first born slashed them away with the silver sword. The trees swung their branches at them and the first born hit back with the sword and the branches moved back allowing them through. 'Keep going,' urged the second born after taking a swig of potion, 'We can do this,' she reinforced. They kept on and presently a wolf came upon them, snarling and teeth shining. The third born waved the fire at it and the wolf stepped back, the first born stood ready with her sword, the wolf sensing strength and fierceness retreated.

Night fell, and the thickness of the trees shut out the light from the full moon, but the third born illuminated the way with her fire stick. 'We must keep going,' urged the second born,

'I'm afraid I'm getting weak,' said the first shakily.

'You are doing amazingly and you have the strength of the sword. We're half-way there and we will be free of the curse!' Encouraged the second. Amongst the trees the eyes of many beasts followed them, but the fire and the sight of the mighty sword kept them at bay.

And so they continued, slashing and stabbing their way forwards, each of the sisters gritting their teeth and staying true to their roles. They moved forwards with determination and finally as the sun rose they found themselves at the edge of the forest and stepped out onto sweet meadow grass.

Jubilantly the sisters wept with joy and hugged. They laughed and cried more when they saw the changes each of them had undergone. 'We're free of the curse!' they sang, 'We're free! We're free!'

And thus this tale comes to an end, the sisters once imprisoned and shackled were now liberated and each one came to know their true selves a little more each day. They began to dream and make plans and found they possessed the gumption and talents to see their dreams into fruition.

It hardly needs saying, but say it I will, the three sisters joyfully lived out the rest of their lives living happily ever after.

ONCE UPON A TIME – REINVENTING THE TALE

I decided to use the construct of the fairy tale in its traditional Western form to create a piece that also had a feminist slant. My attraction to this convention being both nostalgia (I loved reading fairy tales as a young child, particularly Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm) and a fascination with the origin of folk tales. As written in the introduction to Angela Carter's *Book of Fairy Tales*, 'fairy tales, [...] are all of them the most vital connection we have with the ordinary men and women whose labour created the world.' (Carter, 1992 p.xi). Fairy tales, part of folk lore – had their beginnings in the oral tradition of storytelling. (Carter, 1992). Alongside this tradition 'there exists a European convention of an archetypal story teller [...] an old woman sitting by the fireside, spinning – literally 'spinning a yarn' '(Carter, 1992, p.xii). With this in mind alongside the intention of disrupting the traditional characterisations and story arc of well-known fairy tales, I decided to make the workshop a women-only space.

Creative Writing Gets Different

Second-wave feminism of the 1960s led to ‘a heightened awareness of patriarchy and the way it conceived women as domesticated, passive and dependent beings.’ (Smith, p.428) However, a backlash to this progressive movement saw fairy tales being used to reinstate ‘the traditional gender divisions’ that had been successfully subverted. (Smith, p.428) One only has to watch the 2015 version of Cinderella to see how mainstream media continue to propagate the patriarchal ideals of femininity in this fairy tale. Cinderella lives by the mantra of ‘have courage and be kind’ and is rewarded for her extreme beauty and goodness by getting to marry the handsome prince, who saves her from a life of destitution. (2015). In this workshop we will be able to write our own myths and instil values into the story which reflect on feminism and offer an escape from patriarchy.

The workshop will be offered to those with an interest in fairy tales and feminism and as much for established writers as new writers.

Workshop plan

Activity.	Timings.
Introductions.	15 minutes.
Ways of working.	10 minutes.
Guided meditation.	10 minutes.
Freewriting.	15 minutes.
Archetypes.	30 minutes.
Break.	15 minutes.
Symbolism – bring a magic object.	30 minutes.
Writing with the familiar – create a character.	30 minutes.
Story boarding – write/draw a basic plot.	30 minutes.
Invitation to start email group to share work and close workshop.	10 minutes.

PRE-WORKSHOP PREPARATION

Before the workshop I will email the group and as preparation I will invite them to read my fairy tale as an example of a traditional tale disrupted by feminist ideals. For wider reading I will suggest Angela Carter's *Book of Fairy Tales* as this book pulls together stories from around the world, with a great variation of female characters who do not play by the mainstream rules. I will also suggest they watch *Tale of Tales*. This film is based on the stories by Italian courtier Giambattista Basile. Two stories from the film are of particular interest; *La Pulce* (The Flea) and *La Vecchia Scorticata* (The Flayed Old Lady). *The Flea* sees a princess married off to a cannibalistic ogre after her father offers her hand as a prize. This princess manages to kill the ogre and return to her kingdom. *The Flayed Old Lady* is a story of two old sisters, one is magically made to look young again and the king marries her. The other sister is so distraught at having to stay old she pays to have her skin flayed thinking that youthful skin will be underneath. (2015). The film is a contemporary take on old stories with a feminist undertone. I will also ask the group to bring an object that they feel could be magical!

WORKSHOP

Introductions

Seated in a circle I will begin by welcoming all participants and giving a brief description of my experience and why I wanted to do this workshop. I will then invite each person to say a little about why they were interested in the workshop and what sort of writing experience (if any) they have.

Ways of working

To ensure the workshop is a safe environment I will ask the group to suggest guidelines for working and write them up on a board so they are present throughout. I want to elicit as much as possible from the group to create a democratic sense of togetherness. 'Participation' as Wenger writes 'is a complex business that combines doing, talking, thinking, feeling, and belonging.' (1998, pp 55-56) From this beginning of establishing safe ways to work, with ideas such as 'listen to each other, be respectful, have fun', we can begin to create a safe and boundary

lead space. As Bolton asserts 'Boundaries are part of respect; a group creating its own rules can create a sense of confidence and relative safety.' (2011, p190) Just as the three sisters in my tale find a sense of hope from their collectivism and belief in the witch, we will forge a safe, democratic and productive environment from a basis of trust.

Guided meditation

Studies have shown 'that the practise of meditation [...] supports creativity.' (Horan, 2009). I will invite the participants to close their eyes and playing ambient music will deliver a ten-minute guided meditation. After the initial relaxing body scan, I will take the meditation to a magical level invoking images of shape-shifters and tricksters, witches and feisty women. I will position the participants inside this magic world, with their own special powers. In this state of relaxation, the guided meditation allows the participants to 'paint vivid and memorable pictures, and allow expansion of imagery' (Schofield,2002, p.63).

Freewriting

This ten-minute exercise works well after meditation, with a now (hopefully) much relaxed group I will give instructions. I will suggest they write what they think about fairy tales, what they know about them and I will explain as Peter Elbow writes 'that the only requirement is that you never stop' (1998). This is a brilliant exercise to get ideas flowing and to help reduce the inner critic. 'It gets the pen or pencil moving over that space frightening to every writer: a blank page' (Bolton, 2011). It is a practise that hopefully the group will take away with them, if they do not already do it. When the ten minutes is up, I will ask them to talk to the person next to them about any ideas, thoughts they may have had that they would like to share.

Archetypes

We will use the next thirty minutes to discuss and do some work on archetypes or motifs. Folk lore and fairy tales are steeped with archetypes. A familiar trait seen in the stories is the employment of sparse descriptive language, letting the power of the archetype do the work. Garry describes the archetype as 'persistent cultural symbols that are passed down through generations via folklore and literature' (2016,p.xvii). As well as discussing the archetypes

known to us through our own knowledge of fairy tales, we can go about creating our own newer versions. As an example, the witch in my story is good, she may cast spells and fly in a magic cauldron, but she likes to help people. I used the fair maiden archetype with the woman but had her lose everything which is not a common archetype. The three sisters are never described aesthetically but rather by the character traits they have been bewitched with. When they break the curse, they do not run off to marry handsome princes but rather lead very satisfactory lives by achieving their goals. These are all subverted archetypes. Using pictures to spark discussion after a brief introduction from myself with the aforementioned information, I will invite the participants to work in groups of three, the number three is such an archetype in fairy tales! I will ask them to write down all the archetypes they can think of from traditional fairy tales in subheadings of characters, objects, places. After we do feedback on their work, I'll ask them to choose some of the characters and change their typical characteristics to a more modern feminist infused version. I will ask each group to elect a spokesperson to give feedback.

Symbolism, bring a magic object

In my story there are a few magic objects: the witch's cauldron, the sword of strength, the magic potion and the fire stick. The three sister's objects all held symbolic meaning attached to the cure for the sisters' bewitchment. I had invited the participants to bring an object that they felt was magical in some way. This gives people a lot of leeway, but I would expect to see crystals, mortar and pestles, spell books but I suppose there could be some surprise objects as well! It is down to their understanding of what a magic object could be. As Bolton expresses: 'I have always found objects to be conducive for initiating writing' (2011, p193). I would ask the participants to work in pairs and discuss with each other their object and tell the story of where the magic comes from and the powers of said object.

Writing the familiar, creating character

In my fairy tale the main plot is about the plight of the three sisters. Indeed, it was the idea of three sisters trapped within a curse that had been the seedling from which the story grew. I

was interested in how they were prevented from using their authentic voices and inspired in part from three of my aunts. I thought about each of these aunts and exaggerated their characteristics – a general nervousness became heightened fear, a tendency to grumble became an incessant complaining and depression and addiction became the inability to stay awake. The story unfolded through the inception of these characters, how had they become so? And how would they become free?

I will invite the group to think about some characters from their own lives, or even characters they have come across in novels or films. To choose one or some of these characters and sketch out their characteristics, but in fairy tale style to then pare down to perhaps one or two striking traits. I will encourage the group to think of their characters and develop what their internal conflict is, crucial in making a character interesting and readable. (Bell, 2019) We can also use the exercise in archetypes to build on the description of the characters.

There will be time for sharing back and I will invite anyone who wishes, to present their ideas to the group.

Story boarding, write/draw a basic plot

For the final exercise in this workshop, we will embark on the very exciting process of starting to write a plot. Drawing upon all the elements we have worked on previously: archetypes, symbolic objects, writing characters the group will be invited to draw out a six boxed grid on A4 paper. They can then story board and use sketches and some text if they like to plot a basic narrative. This process is described by Law-Viljoen as ‘to ‘build’ a short story from bare bones such as a scene, a character or two, and list of objects that the character might touch or use’ (2012, p135). The advantages of using this approach is to make it less anxiety fuelled for the participants, roughly sketching out ideas is much lower stakes then asking them to produce polished prose. (Law-Viljoen, 2012) I will ask the participants again to think of what conflict there is in the story, as this is integral to giving the narrative shape. (Bell, 2019) The conflict could be influenced by patriarchal systems and / or beliefs. This stage is a natural progression of the workshop and a satisfying activity of ‘making sense of things’ (Bolton, 2011, p.30).

I will ask each member of the group to share their story boards and we can celebrate the work together! Invitation to start email group to share work and close workshop.

I hope that from this workshop, the activities, working together and sharing, there will be some bonding and a sense of a newly formed community. In closing the workshop and thanking all the participants for their interest and work, I will invite those who wish to, to join an email group. This platform would give everybody a space to share their developed work should they like and for some constructive criticism and positive feedback to be given. The workshop was very much about developing ideas and it will be gratifying to see these ideas grow and take shape.

CONCLUSION

Fairy tales are an integral part of the literature that we grew up with, and that children still read today. Whilst there are modern fairy stories which subvert the patriarchal ideas of many more traditional stories, such as Munsch's *The Paper Bag Princess* and Grey's *The Pea and the Princess* there is still prevalence in mainstream culture for the hegemonic ideals of patriarchy. The stories have a real impact, as Haase asserts, 'the romantic myths idealized in fairy tales may negatively affect a woman's self-perception. (2004, p.26).

In changing the narrative and retelling the usual plots and characters to a more modern and feminist stance there is an opportunity for change and growth. Having a workshop with women who are interested in feminism and fairy tales offers 'a critical understanding of the classical as a mirror of the forces limiting women (making) it possible to project alternative ways of constructing lives' (Haase, 2004, p.7).

In writing our own magic with elements perhaps taken from our own lives it serves to create work which is relatable and has truth as a central component. As Gilbert wrote 'Creative writing [...] embraces the horrors and wonders of life: death, anger, injustice, burning desire' (2020) Because the three sisters were

Creative Writing Gets Different

exaggerated versions of real relatives, with recognisable traits, this lends depth to the narrative and psychological resonance for the reader.

Fairy tales are a unique combination of the fantastic and conflict driven situations. Dysfunctional families with neglectful parents and murderous siblings are normal fare. (Carter, 2005) Underpinning the magical and extraordinary there is often at the heart of a tale a gritty realism. The scope for reclaiming the genre and writing conscientiously with feminist ideals is extensive. I plan to continue researching folk lore from around the world and to continue writing these stories of 'once upon a time.'

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BUT ARE YOU SURE IT'S YOUR PLACE? ALASTAIR WARNER

HOW TEACHERS CAN WRITE FICTION ABOUT AND
FOR THEIR STUDENTS OF DIFFERENT HERITAGE

INTRODUCTION

Last year, I wrote a short story for a creative writing class. The piece was written in the first person about a Polish child who used a wheelchair and all the characters in the piece were based upon real children I had worked with as an inner London primary school teacher. I knew these children well, and the story and language flowed effortlessly, including a comment the protagonist made about black classmates having, “very frizzy hair all over their heads,” which was a direct quote of a student I had taught. When it came to discussion of the piece, one classmate was uncomfortable with this line because I, a white person, had written it. Their question was, “but are you sure it’s your place.” I was defensive, but subsequently questioned whether this was due to the “upheaval” that Baines, Tisdale and Long (2018, p.26) claim white people feel having been, “socialized not to recognise ‘White dominance masquerading as normality.’”

At about the same time, a teaching colleague of mine was outraged when we were assigned as a Black History Month text ‘The Fastest Boy in the World’ (Laird, 2014), as this book was written by a white author about Black Africans. She felt this was a colonialist outlook and refused to teach the book.

Both of these scenarios left me as a writer with a quandary. I enjoy writing for children and want to write for and about the children that I know, which means inner city children of various heritages. I had often felt that there was a distinct lack of such children’s literature. I myself am ‘White English’ and grew up in

rural England. This assignment will therefore set out to uncover the issues that arise when teachers write about those students whose heritage differs from their own, discuss whether it is indeed 'their place' to do so and put together a scheme of work to help the discerning teacher do this well. The assignment ends with a piece of my own writing following that scheme.

THE CHALLENGES OF OTHERING

Teleky (2008, p. 208) writes that, "from the earliest twentieth-century fiction in English [has been] written about the immigrant experience by observers from the dominant English-speaking culture." There is much written about the innate approach that is usually taken. Saïd (1978, p.3) writes of, "dealing with the Orient ... as a Western style of dominating, restructuring, and having authority over [it]" and we can apply this to Western approaches to others of non-white heritage. He points out that it leads to Westerners producing works that are, "a sign of European-Atlantic power" rather than a correct description of what they claim to describe. Holliday (2010, p.4) uses the term 'Essentialism' to describe stereotyping people by their culture and notes it is, "only a short, easy distance" from here to chauvinism. He further points out (p.12) that even an improved 'Cosmopolitanist' outlook tends to ignore inequalities and the voices of those on the periphery. Both Saïd and Holliday comment on how durable and tempting these attitudes are. Baines, Tisdale and Long (2018, p.23) write that,

"because bias is so normalised, it can be difficult to see particularly for those who are not victims of it. However, once we are alerted to its presence, we have no choice but to work against it. The reality is that bias can be projected when we don't realize it."

It is therefore essential to alert teachers of the bias that exists before they commence their writing. However, there is a further consideration. Hampton and DeMartini (2017, p.263) acknowledge that a vast array of colonialist literature is out there and cannot be retracted: the attitudes that literature propagates must be acknowledged, engaged with and confronted in our

writing. To not do these things is to risk what they describe as, “re-centring whiteness, thus eliminating the possibility of actual decolonization,” or could even “naturalize white supremacy to make the current social order seem fair to those who benefit from it and unavoidable to those whom it marginalizes.” (Hampton and DeMartini, 2017, p.253)

A useful example for us is that of Clanchy (2019), whose memoir ‘Some Kids I Taught and What They Taught Me’ led to her having to apologise to readers offended by “the use of racial tropes such as ‘chocolate-coloured skin’ and ‘almond-shaped eyes’”, with a rewrite of the entire book now promised (Campbell, 2021).

Whilst Clanchy’s experience should warn us to tread carefully, Rhodes (2012) argues strongly for the kind of writing I am promulgating, stating that, “Of course, a writer should write about whomever and whatsoever they please, whether it be unknowable aliens, or ethnic and racial groups from far afield.” She goes on to make the point that to avoid writing about those of different heritage may in itself be racist, because, “if race, itself an artificial construct, prevents us from ‘knowing’ and writing about one another, then we are suggesting that people are not a common family.” It is an inspiring argument that even, “to ‘write what you know’ fosters provincialism.” It offers a defence of writers like Laird but also a warning for us as writers of the importance of characterisation:

“Always, however, guard against writing stereotypes. Cultural assimilation and acculturation as well as the opposite, cultural tension and rifts, can produce, at times, one-dimensional impressions of people and culture. The writer’s responsibility is to create multidimensional characters that are not types but unique, complex beings.”

We might question whether it is safer for a person of colour, such as Rhodes, to issue this rallying cry and to confidently write about those of other heritage than for a white person who could be seen as ‘othering’ from the cultural mainstream in the many ways I have outlined above, but her argument is useful and inspiring nonetheless.

WORKSHOP DESIGN

Booker (2005 p.87) introduces the idea of the 'Quest' story, and one of the drivers of this assignment was my own childhood love of such stories where children solve mysteries. Mills (2006, p.134) writes that,

"The characters' experience in a story must be imaginable to those children who are reading, must be part of a world they can inhabit. But that doesn't mean it has to be a known and familiar every-day form of reality."

My concern was that the books I have mentioned tend to be full of 'white English' characters adventuring in a rural setting: not a world that the urban, various heritage children I teach feel they could inhabit. Hamand (2012, p.190) writes that such stories can involve mystery or magic, but I felt that the magic genre has been saturated in recent years, and so chose to focus the workshops on quest stories where children solve mysteries in the inner city.

Gilbert (2017, p.3) posits that the foci of Creative Writing workshop planning should be content, purpose and pedagogy. I will therefore, "have a learning goal and learning purposes for each lesson," (Gilbert, 2017, p.3) and then outline the activities to be included.

Gilbert (2017, p.6) describes 'free writing' as, "a classic task ... to get students into the 'flow' of things." Elbow (1998, p.38) is also a proponent, arguing that it removes the burden to get the writing right and stops us editing out things we might have felt were unacceptable. Given the challenges I have uncovered of deeply entrenched attitudes to 'others' and the need for honesty and open-mindedness in our approach, I will start each workshop with a free writing exercise.

Elbow (1998, p.119) describes a process for reviewing the writing of others:

"Summarize the writing: a) First tell very quickly what you found to be the main points, main feelings, or centers of gravity. Just sort of say what comes to mind for fifteen seconds ... b) Then summarize it into a single sentence. c) Then choose one word from the writing which best summarizes it. d) Then choose a word that isn't in the

Creative Writing Gets Different

writing to summarize it. Do this informally. Don't plan or think too much about it. The point is to show the writer what things he made stand out most in your head, what shape the thing takes in your consciousness."

I will end each workshop with participants reviewing each other's work thus.

WORKSHOP 1

Learning goals

Teachers should develop an understanding of the challenges they may face in writing fiction featuring students of different heritage to their own.

Teachers should begin to understand some of the considerations they must be aware of before undertaking such writing.

Purposes

As outlined in the first part of this assignment, some teachers, as White Europeans, are part of a complex and deeply ingrained discourse with cultures and heritages different from their own. Bolton (2011, p.189) writes, "we know a great deal more than we are aware, having absorbed information unwittingly." We must bring this to the attention of teachers and develop open minds to our entrenched attitudes, as discussed by Zwozdiak-Myers (2011, p.27), who also suggests teachers should ask, "searching questions that arise from their own circumstances and interests." (p. 33)

Our purpose in this lesson is therefore to make teachers aware of the challenges some may face as a result of entrenched 'White, Western' attitudes and begin to ask searching questions to help us open our minds, which Teleky (2001, p.25) refers to as, "Examining Self."

Starter

Ten minute free writing activity. Choose one child in your current class and write about them, their life and challenges they may face daily. Try to choose a child whose life is particularly different to your own.

Main activities

A presentation of the issues around othering as outlined in the first part of this assignment, making reference to the challenges faced by Clanchy (Clanchy, 2019 and Campbell, 2021) as well as the arguments put forth by Rhodes.

A presentation of statistics and experiences of racial/cultural discrimination experienced in the UK, followed by a class discussion, giving space for participants to share their own experiences and opinions.

“Examining self” (Teleky, 2001, p.25) activity, answering searching questions, some based on Teleky’s examples, others chosen by me:

What are my assumptions and expectations for students of colour, immigrant students, students from low-income households, and their families?

What knowledge and expertise do these students and their families bring to my classroom?

How does discrimination affect the day to day lives of these children and their families?

Do these children and their families feel included and accepted in day to day life in the UK, both in our school, local area, elsewhere in our city and in other parts of the country?

Participants share their answers with each other and review according to Elbow’s (1998, p.119) process.

WORKSHOP 2

Learning goals

Teachers should start to develop rounded characters based upon their own students.

Purposes

Hamand (2012, p.57) writes that characters are fundamental to our writing and must be real and convincing. Rhodes (2012) tells us,

Creative Writing Gets Different

“Remember: character drives plot. When starting a new story, focus on what connects us all – namely, interior emotions. What do your characters want – need – fear – dream about?”

Morley (2007, p.167) warns us to, “go wary of caricaturing somebody real ... Absolute reality writes fiction badly.”

In *Emil and the Detectives* (Kästner, 1931), we are introduced to a fully-rounded protagonist within the first four pages, through the conversation of Emil and his mother and extra information in the caption of the first illustration. Depth of character is added with Emil’s despair at his Sunday suit, a device identically used by Crompton (1924, p.21). Crompton elsewhere effectively introduces her character William by his toneless and aggravating singing and whistling (1923, pp.77-78). Laird (2014, p.1) tells us much about her protagonist Solomon in just one sentence: “I was eleven years old. At least, I think I was eleven. In the countryside in Ethiopia, nobody takes much notice of how old you are.”

Atta (2019, p.77) shows how we can use dialogue to give information about characters which might otherwise be clumsy: “Mum starts with her own version of the Spanish Inquisition: ‘Are you Spanish?’

‘No. My dad is English,’ says Daisy,
‘and my mum is half-English, half-Jamaican.’

...

‘Michael and Anna’s dads are Jamaican.
I’m Greek-Cypriot,’ Mum says, proudly.”

Starter

Ten-minute free writing activity. Choose one child in your current class and, “Describe the person in minute detail. Then go back, selecting the most important features, and write a shorter description.” (Hamand, 2012, p.61).

Main activities

Develop a character’s emotions, as prescribed by Rhodes (2012) in these two exercises suggested by Hamand (2012, p.62):

Inspiration and Diversity

“Write about your character doing an ordinary, everyday activity, such as making a cup of tea, combing his hair or going for a walk. Describe his actions in detail.”

“Imagine your character keeps a diary. Write down a diary entry for a random day, writing in her voice, as you think she would write. Look at what style the character wrote in. Is she wordy or terse? Does she write about herself or about other people or events? Does she reveal her thoughts and feelings, or is she hiding from herself? Is she angry, happy, jealous, sad? You can then use what the diary entry reveals to portray that character more completely.”

Participants share their writing with each other and review according to Elbow’s (1998, p.119) process.

WORKSHOP 3

Learning goals

Students should build a contemporary city setting for their story.

Purposes

Rhodes (2012) tells us, “World building is essential to fiction ... Don't be afraid of letting time and place soar and be reconfigured by your imagination.” Hamand (2012, p.101) implores us to use all our senses in describing a setting, to make our work deeper and more realistic.

Emil and the Detectives (Kästner, 1931, p.69) offers a good example of a busy, urban setting, evoked through the wondering eyes and ears of a boy recently arrived from a small, provincial town:

“The noise was indescribable, and on the pavements crowds of people kept hurrying by. Out of every turning, vans and lorries, trams and double-decker buses swarmed into the main thoroughfare. There were newspaper stands at every corner, with men shouting the latest headlines. Wherever Emil looked there were gay shop windows filled with flowers and fruit, books,

Creative Writing Gets Different

clothes, fine silk underwear, gold watches and clocks. And all the buildings stretched up and up into the sky. So this was Berlin!”

Gunaratne (2018, p.106) makes effective use of sound and smell to describe the urban world his characters inhabit:

“A clique of tiny stush Chinese girls pass us. Chatting loud. They sound like they breathing helium or suttan. The boxing club is by the car park, ennet, so we duck into London Road. Smell from that Quality Fried Chicken hits me.”

Starter

Ten-minute free writing activity. Use the character described in the previous week and write about them walking through your city scene. Use all five senses in your writing.

Main activities

Complete this letter writing activity (inspired by Chase, 1974): write a letter from your character to a friend in another part of the country or in another country, explaining what life in London is like.

Explore describing settings as suggested by Hamand (2012, p.107): “Describe a place familiar to a character in a story. Look carefully at the adjectives you used. How does changing them affect the mood of the piece?”

Experiment with changing the adjectives and removing or adding adjectives.

Participants share their writing with each other and review according to Elbow’s (1998, p.119) process.

WORKSHOP 4

Learning goals

Students should devise interesting counters to anchor their story and begin to invent a story outline involving their characters, setting and counter.

Purposes

Mills (2006, p.136) tells us that, “children need to form an impression of an available story element quickly and hang on to it,” and suggests using a, “counter or story marker [which] must be aglow with interest for the characters—not just for readers.” Hamand (2012, p.98) concurs, telling us that, “objects are incredibly useful in fiction,” as when we describe an object well, “it becomes significant and important – the reader will remember it.”

We can see objects used to great effect in much children’s fiction. In ‘Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone’ (Rowling, 1997), the eponymous stone is a plot device which several characters are trying to locate. The graphic novel ‘Akissi – Attaque de Chats’ (Abouet & Sapin, 2010) uses a fish in a bag which is not only the plot device that Akissi is attempting to ferry through the city streets, but also represents her mother who has entrusted her with the task. Kästner (1931) uses Emil’s small wodge of notes as a plot device throughout ‘Emil and the Detectives’, which similarly represents his mother and his responsibility to her.

Starter

Ten-minute free writing activity. Write about an object that appears in your day-to-day life.

Main activities

Complete this story activity suggested by Mills (2006, p.152) incorporating the characters and setting explored in previous workshops:

“Invent a story for children with one or more of the following as a counter: a shed at the bottom of the garden; the head of a rhinoceros; a van arriving to take your home away; a place where you used to play and have fun in; a child’s strong impression of a mother’s or father’s place of work; a building in the town where you lived when you were young; an interesting object owned by somebody else.”

Participants share their writing with each other and review according to Elbow’s (1998, p.119) process.

CRITICAL CONCLUSION

Overall, the message is that we can do this writing, we even should do this writing, but we must be aware of our place in a long and complex discourse, aware of our responsibilities to represent at times harsh realities, and aware of what we should avoid. We should approach our writing as ‘Critical Cosmopolitanists’ who, “insist that Periphery cultural realities should be allowed room to express themselves in resistance to the dominant global cosmopolitan imagination,” (Holliday, 2010, p.12) and perhaps see ourselves as being part of those cultural realities rather than taking the view that, ‘I’m white and English so I don’t have a culture’(Quarshie, 2011, p.171).

We equally have a connected responsibility to write good quality fiction and must strive to create rounded characters in realistic settings, avoiding stereotypes as we describe them. The use of counters to locate our characters in this time and place and to guide our readers through the story is crucial.

We must be ready to defend our work as being written by and about members of the human race but also be open minded, which Zwozdiak-Myers (2011, p.27) calls a, “willingness to consider more than one side of an argument and fully embrace and attend to alternative possibilities,” which, “may require recognition that formerly held views and beliefs could be misconceived.” Rewriting, as Clanchy did, when we are called out on our misconceptions may, therefore, just be a part of this process.

MODEL OF FINAL NARRATIVE PIECE

There are lots of stories that end with children finding treasure. This one is rather different. It begins with children finding treasure.

Yusuf was ten years old. He was walking down a wide street, whistling piercingly. People passing by glared at him as the terrible sound left his pursed lips, and even though Yusuf’s face

was screwed with the effort of whistling, he still managed to glare back. Yusuf glared often and glared well. He did not enjoy foolish or stupid people and was very good at telling foolish and stupid people that they were exactly that. But he was also very kind when it was needed, which was the main thing.

Yusuf's whistling got louder as the noise in the street around him grew louder. This was a London street and there was a lot going on. The road itself was four lanes of busy traffic and many dirty red double-decker buses chugged by, pumping out blue smoke with engines roaring. There were cars and lots of them, playing pounding music which made the pavements shake. People were everywhere too, people dressed in all kinds of brightly coloured clothes and with all sorts of different hairstyles. The people called to each other across the noise, their voices rising in lots of different languages. Some of the languages Yusuf did not know but he recognised. There was French, which Mariam would understand, and there was Somali, which Awad would know. But a lot of the crying out was in English and Yoruba, and this Yusuf could understand, because his family were Nigerian, but he had lived in London his whole life. Yusuf was used to the noise and the bustle of London, so he kept walking, whistling loudly and glaring at people, until he reached a tall, curved brick building on a corner, with rickety wooden doors underneath a golden sign reading, 'Dragon Court'. He took a key from his pocket and slipped it into the lock.

When Yusuf got into the lobby of the building, the door slammed behind him and it was quiet very suddenly. It was dark too. The sun had been shining in the street, and now shone into the building through just the dirty glass on the door, making patterns across the floor of the lobby. The electric lightbulbs hanging from the high ceiling were bare and dim through heavy cobwebs. This lobby had been very grand once, and now it was very shabby. In the middle, under a huge clock which had told the world it was quarter past eleven for Yusuf's whole life and longer, was a mirror. It was all tarnished, so parts of it looked gold and parts of it were brown and everything you saw in it was a bit wobbly and pink, and Yusuf, who was quite a proud boy, looked at himself. He was a tall boy for ten, thin and wiry with very dark brown skin. His head was bullet shaped and his hair

cut very, very short. Yusuf turned his head slightly, to admire a side parting which had been cut into his hair with trimmers. This was new and he was proud of it. Pleased with his appearance, he scowled manfully.

The stairs and the broken lift towards the flats were all to the left of the mirror. But Yusuf did not turn left. Instead, he went right, down a dark side passage, then stooped nimbly behind a large plant pot holding a sadly drooping green fern. There was a hole in the wall here, and behind the hole, which was just large enough for Yusuf to squeeze through, he dropped down about a metre onto a staircase, in almost complete darkness. At the bottom of these dark stairs, underground now, was a girl standing in front of a door. She was shorter than Yusuf and with braided extensions clipped in her hair. She had a larger, sulky looking face and was grimacing enormously. She held up a hand and pulled her lips into an even bigger pout.

“Stop. Who goes there?”

“Oh, oh, Mariam, why do you always have to be so stupid?” I have already told you that Yusuf did not have much time for silliness. “Of course it’s me.”

“Well, it’s dark and you’re fifteen minutes late. Which is why I’m still out here and we can’t start the meeting.” Mariam pouted even more, so her top lip almost touched her nose. She shook her head, and one of the extensions fell out and landed with a clatter on the floor. Whilst she picked it up and dusted it off, Yusuf pushed open the door behind her and she followed him, both of them grumbling about the other, into an underground room that was surprisingly filled with light from high windows. The room was huge, the size of a school hall probably and just as high, and in the middle of it was a vast machine, ancient metal and painted in black and green. It was covered in dials and valves and big red taps and there was an enormous plate pressed in one side that said ‘Empire Made – 1937’. This was the boiler room. Assembled around the boiler, looking at their two bickering friends, stood three more children. Now there were five of them, and Mariam closed the door firmly and pushed a large metal pipe across it so it could not be opened from the other side.

The children of Dragon Court would meet on the first day of each holiday to grumble quietly about what they should do over

the next few weeks. Yusuf always wanted to take the bus to Brixton to visit his cousin Abdul-Matin in his barbershop, and Mariam always wanted to take the bus to Clapham to go to the ice cream parlour which did the enormous gooey strawberry ice creams. Awad, who was a year younger and rather short with chubby cheeks, always wanted to get the train into town and go to the Science Museum, which would cause a row because none of them were allowed to go into town, nor get the train or the tube without an adult. And Leah, who was ten like Mariam and Yusuf, with long, greasy hair and a sharp but pretty face, would want to go shopping up the High Road, and sunbathe on the common. They would argue about what to do first and usually Yusuf would win, and then often it would rain so they couldn't do any of these things.

Today though, something was different. Awad was bouncing from foot to foot with excitement and Leah's eyes were shining through her lank blonde hair. Mariam even smiled a little bit now, although she stopped quite quickly and pouted again.

"Well, he's here, so we can finally tell him and then start hunting for it. Don't worry, he's not sorry he kept us waiting." Then she shook her head again and lost another extension, which had to be retrieved and stuffed in her pockets with the last one. Later that night, Mariam's mother, Mrs. Kouassi, would tut as she clipped them all back in again. Yusuf clicked his tongue impatiently.

"We're not all here, are we. Where's the baby?" His eyes shone defiantly as he said this. He knew it was against the rules. Leah told him off, sharply.

"He's having one of his days. Mr. Green answered the door in his boxer shorts and we could hear Toby yelling and Mr. Green said he wouldn't come out today." She paused. "You know you're not supposed to be mean. It's not Toby's fault. He's just ... like that."

Yusuf knew and sort of understood really, although it annoyed him that Toby got a special grown up to help him at school, and he was allowed to scream and throw things when suddenly his Maths got too hard or when the timetable for the day changed unexpectedly. It frustrated Yusuf, who preferred things to be calm and didn't like fuss. He clicked his tongue again, softly.

“So what are you going to tell me?” he asked, looking around the dusty, bright room. “What are we hunting for?” The other children smiled and Leah spoke.

“Well, it was actually Awad that found it. Tell him Awad.”

There was a pause. Awad’s face still glowed with excitement, but he was rather afraid of Yusuf and his impatience, so he stammered slightly before he spoke.

“Well, I came down here early, you see. My dad went to work at six, and Mum’s taken Amal to my aunt in Harrow, so it was just me and ...” another pause “... the maid...” There was a silence whilst Yusuf half closed his eyes and made his tutting sound. Awad’s father was a journalist and their family were rich. They lived in a large flat across the top floor of the building. Yusuf’s father was a driving instructor and they lived in a much more ragged and smaller flat facing the road.

“Anyway, I came down here to get out of the way because the maid was cleaning my room, and I wanted a place to sit on the floor that wasn’t so dusty so I moved some old crates and that was when I found the trapdoor.” At this point Awad gestured to a clear space on the floor, where there was indeed a large metal trapdoor, half covered by the vast boiler. In the middle of the trapdoor was a small wooden panel. Mariam carried on talking, as Awad had trailed off.

“The trapdoor’s locked. But you can open the wooden panel and, oh Yusuf, look inside and see. It’s treasure!”

Yusuf cast Mariam a haughty glance. He didn’t believe in children finding treasure, just as he didn’t believe in fairies or magic or enchanted trees in the woods. He filed all of these things under the category ‘superstition’, which he firmly believed was against his culture, his religion and his general outlook on the world. His eyes blazed.

“Treasure! I’m not going to spend my holidays playing make-believe games with a load of soft kids like you.” He was about to flounce out when Leah, who was a little tougher than the rest, grabbed him firmly by his protruding ear and pulled him across the room and down, so his eyes were level with the wooden panel.

“Ow! Oh, oh, Leah, just like you, to hurt a man and pull him, pull him without asking.” And then, Yusuf stopped talking.

Because Leah had slammed open the tiny wooden panel and through it, Yusuf saw another room, just as cavernous and somehow just as brightly lit as this one. It was dusty too, but there was no boiler. Instead, there were chairs, ornately carved from ancient wood, and draped with fur coats. Paintings loomed from the corner, old looking and in ornate frames. There were wardrobes and chests and what looked like jewellery boxes, one open with a rope of pearls hanging out onto folded silk. In one corner, glinting from the sunlight, there was a coat of armour. In another, several swords, just thrown there. Yusuf gaped, but no words would come out of his mouth. Here, deep in the ground, under this ramshackle old block of flats in south London, there was a real treasure trove.

Later that day, the children met again, this time in Awad's bedroom. They had quite quickly left their treasure trove and their usual boiler room meeting place too, which suddenly felt like not a safe place to be. There had always been a slight thrill of being caught down there, either by Sol, the grumpy building caretaker, or by Jenny, the irritable lady with the sharp nose who was the chair of the board of leaseholders. Now however, they did not want to bring attention to their loot, so they had disbanded. Yusuf had needed to run errands for his mother, so had headed to Brixton Market on the bus with a ten-pound note and a shopping list. Mariam had spent most of the day sulkily baby-sitting her small brother Callum, leaving Leah and Awad to spend an impatient afternoon sitting on Awad's living room floor, idly watching television and talking non-stop about the treasure. Whose was it? How did it get there? Who knew it was there? Was it stolen?

These questions were being discussed again now that Mariam and Yusuf had joined them. Mariam, however, was keen to discuss a much more burning question?

"How are we going to get into the room?" She looked around. No one had an answer.

"There must be a key somewhere. Someone knows how to get in there!"

"How do you know that?" Yusuf had turned his fiery eyes onto her. "Those treasures could have been sitting there moulding for a hundred years!"

Creative Writing Gets Different

It was Mariam's turn to sneer slightly.

"Oh yes, Yusuf, of course. They looked really mouldy, didn't they? And where was the dust? A hundred years? Those fur coats were shining clean!"

It wasn't often that Mariam got one over on Yusuf, and so she enjoyed her success by pouting broadly and shaking her head with triumph. Once she had retrieved several hair extensions from the floor and stowed them in her pocket, Leah spoke.

"That means someone knows they're there. Which means ... well, it means this is dangerous, doesn't it? I mean, why is someone hiding treasures like that? Someone's up to no good."

Just at that moment, there was a tap on the door and Awad's maid stuck her head around.

"Mister Toby is here, Awad."

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WRITING FOR MOTHERS: LUCY WILLIAMS

NIGHT NOTES

'It is Chinnamasta who severs her own head, and only Chinnamasta who feeds her devotees with her own blood. For postnatal women, the experience of transformation is direct, bloody and embodied.'

Uma Dinsmore-Tul, Yoni Shakti, 2014

INTRODUCTION

THE NIGHT OF A NEW MOTHER

It is the dead of night and you are awake. You drift. You listen to the breath that you have birthed, soothed, rocked, sung to sleep night after night, day after day. Thoughts play out. It is difficult to observe your own breathing: where might you start? If you try, you might hear that it is rasping, desperate, surrendered. You look out of the darkened window and see that there is a room lit up further down the street and the light of it hurts your eyes.

Eventually, desperate to find peace so that tomorrow has a chance, you come to sit cross legged on the floor - landing. You lean forwards, and then back, feeling your hips pull, your spine bend. Alone in the dark, you begin to move through what might be described as a spontaneous series of checks on your body: rolling the ends of your bones in their joints, massaging muscles against the ground, matching your breath with each stroke. The movements are slow, careful and incredibly calming. After a while, from a surreal state of disconnection from the life you have built, from inside the body, you might sit down to write. What comes? Does it pour more easily? Do you recognise yourself in the words you write? How are you?

WHY WRITE? ISN'T THERE ENOUGH TO DO?

As a mother of a young child, I wanted to bring to the fore the complexities of new motherhood- too often they are overlooked. In 2015-17, maternal suicide was the second largest cause of direct maternal deaths (Mbrace-UK, 2017). Over 82% of all mothers feel lonely at some point (Red Cross, Co-Op, 2019). We are encouraged by society and each other to accept depleted visions of motherhood, but we must not. It is only through the radical act of deep reflection that we might break the cycles which devalue us, and come to understand our true worth within society.

I do moving meditations when I cannot sleep. A moving meditation is a term for a repeated movement or series of movements during which the breath guides the movement and the mind is focused on physical sensation. Since being a mother, I have found it interesting to follow these meditations with a free-write, a methodology advocated by therapists and pedagogists alike (Bolton, 2011; Elbow, 1998; Hogan, 2012; Haeka, 2000; Isaacs, 2021). Usually, when I wake in the morning, I cannot remember what I have written; as though it were a dream. But when I reread the short paragraphs, I see that they are honest, free-flowing and clear, as though I am peering into the truth of myself.

The activities proposed are only an offering. It is not something that you should be doing. My hope is that you might remember this essay one night and land, as described above, to see what happens. Hopefully, you might feel a sense of empowerment, liberation and connection to self.

ACADEMIC INTRODUCTION: WHAT'S IN THIS ESSAY?

This essay is an interwoven tapestry of creative writing and academic commentary. Academically, I will begin by outlining the state of the female condition within modern society - specifically of mothers – and will continue to suggest how a writing process

Creative Writing Gets Different

might offer empowerment to new mothers during the transitional, postpartum phase. Each 'Night Note' embedded within the essay is a creative writing exercise that I have produced during the night as the mother of a small child. These meditations, notes and reflections exemplify the suggested writing process in practice, provide an opportunity for analysis and connection to suggesting theorists and pedagogic approaches, and are an offering to other new mothers.

CREATIVE NOTE #1

Meditation

Kneel,
Rest warm palms on thighs,
Crown rises,
Shoulders fall.
Are you breathing?
Listen.

Ripple the torso
Lean forward
And rise
Gradual build
Hands support you
Exhale: forehead to the ground
Inhale: rise

Bow to yourself continuously

Slow and stop.
Rest warm palms on thighs,
Crown rises,
Shoulders fall.
Are you breathing?

NOTE ONE: 03.30

I went to the shop today. I took the pram and when I got half way down the road the front wheel began to squeak. My baby was asleep inside. So I pushed him in his chariot, across the concrete landscape void of beauty and allowed the squeak to continue. Incessant. There were other women on their lunch break and they smiled at my squeaking, stepping out of my way, adjusting themselves. When I arrived, I bought the wrong things. I know that now.

When my partner returns home from work he looks incredibly clean. His shirt is white and his hair is somehow perfectly placed as it was this morning. I look down at my clothes. They are three days old- stained, musty smelling. Far from being perfectly placed on my head, my hair is wild and feral. I smooth it. He kisses my head and asks what he should make for tea. I think of the shop and wonder who has made more decisions today. I want to tell him that I am just as important as he is. Am I? I'm not as clean, ordered, assured, that much at least is clear.

RESPONSE TO NOTE ONE:

What are the symbols through which we see success? Is a clean appearance more valuable than a wild and feral one? How can you explain the decisions you made today? What did they accomplish? What did your partner get paid today? What did society return to you for your work? Why did the women at the shop smile, but not speak to you to offer a solution? Why did they not laugh with you about the stupid noise? Why did they leave you alone?

ACADEMIC COMMENTARY: MODERN MOTHERHOOD

Women's plight is ongoing. We have come a long way from 'the great domestication' of women (Patel & Moore, 2018: 72). Religion no longer 'urges submission' in women or demands men to 'follow the model of authoritarianism offered by the Heavenly Father' (Patel & Moore, 2018: 7) to control their wives. There is

no longer a sense of 'transforming women's bodies into compliant machines of reproduction (which) took force and fear and social policing.' Yet women are not truly emancipated from the patriarchal structures that have governed society for so long. We have moved beyond explicitly violent modes of oppression as described by Patel and Moore (in most cases, though not all), but towards 'internalized concepts (which) can limit individual choices' (Dent, 2017: 540) compounded and reinforced by societal ignorance of the lived experience of women.

INTERNALISATION OF ANDROCENTRISM

Historically, society has been structured to benefit men (Friedan, B. 1963; Gilligan, C, 1982, De Beauvoir, S. 1949). Now, we must demand 'gender justice' and understand that this demand is 'a complex conception' which requires not the simplification of 'equality' or 'difference from men', but the deconstruction of gender roles completely (Fraser, 1994; Singh, S. 2007; Williams, J. 1989).

In 1994, Fraser envisioned three radically progressive versions of society with the aim of differentiating those which are beneficial to men, and those which benefit and empower both men and women:

In 'the universal breadwinner' model, women are able 'to support themselves and their families through their own wage earning'. The model does not overcome androcentrism, as 'it valorizes men's traditional sphere - employment - and simply tries to help women fit in' (Fraser, 1994: 174). At the other end of the spectrum Fraser suggests 'the caregiver parity model', which gives valued status to care/domestic workers including mothers (Fraser, 1994: 175). Though this model allows women more leisure time and prevents poverty, it does not ensure income equality and may perpetuate the marginalisation of women from society. 'The universal caregiver' model (Fraser's proposed solution) 'induces men to become more like women (Fraser, 1994: 82) ie. take part in care work to enable women to be involved in employment. This 'deconstruction of gender roles' is the only way society might be organised to promote women's

authentic emancipation (Fraser, 1994; Singh, S. 2007; Williams, J. 1989).

Over two decades preceding Fraser's work: 'Why on earth are the chore wars not won by now? It's nearly half a century since the wages for housework movement highlighted the rank injustice of ignoring unpaid female domestic labour' (Hinsliff, 2019). Rather, 'Motherhood is one of our modern, enlightened society's awkward little secrets', Glasser (2021) argues; a statement which is supported by Dent's research (2017). Her research found evidence of: internalisation of devalued position can have on an individual's position even when they have concrete evidence of structural inequality; a lack of resistance to gender-based inequality; the female, maternal body being unwelcome in the patriarchal workplace; an increase in men's economic value in the workplace following marriage and parenthood, leading to unequal domestic division of labor in the home; naturalization of 'double burden' on women; denial of a gender divide in a relationship when there clearly is one; the hidden value of domestic work. Most pertinently, Dent found that whilst in 'working-class motherhood, the women in her study displayed awareness of their marginalized position and used it to construct alternative concepts of value', they felt that 'there was little recognition of othering because they considered themselves to be the norm of maternal practice' because the transition to the maternal field produced 'affirmations of empowerment' (Dent, 2017: 548). Glasser (2021) supports this finding, suggesting that the 'reality is concealed by the rhetoric of feminist progress, choice and empowerment' and that 'at a time when women are supposed to be more liberated than ever before, modern motherhood has become rigidly perfectionist' (Glasser, 2021).

Dent argues that the internalisation of 'devalued status' is a form of 'symbolic violence, whereby subjects are denied a language to articulate their position, reflecting postfeminist concepts of entanglement and repudiation' (Dent, 2017: 550). Her research suggests that gender roles have not been deconstructed, but that androcentric norms have been internalised. Feminist creative writing can redress this issue by supporting women to reflect on

their own experience both conscious and unconscious, making them aware of the internalised norms and perhaps encouraging them to challenge them.

SOCIETAL IGNORANCE ON THE EXPERIENCE OF MOTHERHOOD

In parallel, the experience of women is not widely understood nor accepted. The narration of the female experience has been limited by the patriarchal language and categorisation around the female experience (Haeka, 2000). In the study of literature, it should be acknowledged that ‘women’s writing is determined not by essential properties or isolated aesthetic imperatives, but by complex and changing conventions that are themselves produced in and by the relations of power’ (Lanser, 1992: 6). A lack of transparency and exposure around the female experience along with other patriarchal structures has arguably resulted in a widely unrecognised crisis point in female mental health.

This is especially pertinent in mothers: ‘one in five women* in the UK developing a mental health illness during pregnancy or up to a year after birth and suicide is one of the leading causes of death. Furthermore, services for perinatal mental health are patchy, with high thresholds for conventional treatments. This leads to many women* with mild to moderate symptoms having little specialist support.’ (Isaacs, 2021). According to research carried out by NCT (2017) over a fifth (22%) of women who had the six-week check were not asked about their emotional wellbeing at all, nearly 20% with an emotional or mental health problem did not feel able to disclose it in the check, nearly half (43%) of those who didn’t disclose a problem said their doctor did not seem interested or sympathetic, a quarter (24%) said there wasn’t time and 46% were worried that health professionals would think they weren’t capable of looking after their baby.

This lack of recognition demonstrates the silent vacuum around the hardships of motherhood in modern society. Here, we can see how creative writing can be used to raise the volume of the voice of the mother.

RESISTANCE

Whilst organisations calling for deconstruction of gender roles (Molano, S. 2021), 'feminism's longevity compounds the problem' (Glaser, 2021) and the outcomes remain drastic and oppressive. Creative writing can be used as a tool to resist patriarchal structures through reflection and presentation of lived reality.

Writing is a social act (Cremin & Myhill, 2012: 11) giving voice and value to those who are heard. It influences the way we see ourselves, which is especially pertinent when taking into account Dent's conclusion of internalised devaluation. By 'using language in speech or in writing (that) is fundamentally expressive of who we are (we can) we create meaning for ourselves.' (Cremin & Myhill, 2012: 21). Perhaps we might see new mothers as 'emerging writers' embarking on a journey to understand their own perception of themselves as mothers in 'a space to be and speak who we are, as we know us, our own selves' (Haeka, 2000: 21) and in turn deflate the 'otherness' that women experience when they are in the postpartum experience. Gillie Bolton (2011) advocates that 'art has the power to help people understand themselves, each other and their world better' (Bolton, 2011: 17) and to make sense of their lives (Hogan, 2012). She believes that 'explorative and expressive writing can communicate psychological, social, cultural and spiritual truths' (Bolton, 2011: 18), evidence of which can be seen in the creative writing examples in this assignment and in feminist projects such as 'Maternal Journal' (Isaacs, 2021) which uses 'creative journaling to help restore some balance around the new feelings and challenges we might experience, both physically and emotionally, through pregnancy, birth and new parenthood'.

In the literary sphere the novelist, Rachel Cusk, has used the tools of the creative writer to resist the patriarchal myths about motherhood in her essay 'The Aftermath'.

Cusk explains that her husband cared for the children and that they are both financially equal, suggesting the emergence of Fraser's seemingly utopian 'universal caregiver' model, in which

both partners care for the children and work in equal measure. But Cusk moves past the pragmatic skeleton and reveals the ugly psychological impact beneath by suggesting that when all tasks of family life are shared: there is 'still a dissonance between interior life and exterior appearance' (Wade, 2019). Her husband still 'felt it was womanly to shop and cook, to collect the children from school', yet those exact pursuits left Cusk herself feeling 'most unsexed'. Though the traditional caregiver role did not feel right to Cusk, neither did careerist motivations: 'to succeed, to win, to provide – did not quite fit me either: they were like a suit of clothes made for someone else, but they were what was available. So I wore them and felt a little uncomfortable, a little unsexed, but clothed all the same' (Cusk, 2011). Here, Cusk is revealing that though the expectations of Fraser's 'universal caregiver model' have been laid out for heteronormative couples, that remaining gender structures within society can still create dissatisfaction. The creative analogy of the 'suit' is a patriarchal construct, and needs to be replaced, showing how gender roles are still embedded in Cusk's psyche.

Cusk's work critiques Fraser's 'universal caregiver model' when she deliberates the 'ownership' of her children when she and her husband separate. She lists the reasons they should belong to her: 'The long pilgrimage of pregnancy with its wonders and abasements, the apotheosis of childbirth, the sacking and slow rebuilding of every last corner of my private world that motherhood has entailed', but later reluctantly rationalises that as an equal caregiver, her partner also has a right to their custody. This partial loss of her children leads her to question her feminist ideals throughout her marriage, berating herself for giving up her traditional role as a mother. This reverts to Dent's research, which argues that white middle class women still suffer the impact of patriarchal society though they appear to be empowered to make decisions about their life.

Ultimately, in a line that draws together both the confusion around gender identity and the weight of choice, Cusk ends the essay with the metaphor 'I am a self-hating transvestite'. It is in this line that we see the loss of self that can come from

motherhood in today's society, an idea which is compounded by Glasser's emotive description: 'I have clung on, panicked, to my professional and social identity while tumbling through babyworld and hurtling between the incommensurate time zones of school and work' (Glasser, 2021).

Nonetheless, we should see Cusk's work as a radical act of resistance. Her creative writing explorations encourage creative and expressive work about motherhood and resists the expectation on women to internalise the devaluation put upon us. It is an example of the reality of a woman's lived experience being aired. Through my own writing I have found that the process encourages reflection and illumination for the writer, and the publishing of the piece shocks and inspires those who are becoming aware of an 'othered' experience for the first time.

CREATIVE NOTE #2

Meditation

You are on your hands and knees, pressing down
Your back arches and domes, arches and domes
The movement should be slow: a tender slither
See the bones of your spine in your mind's eye
Love the bones of your spine in your mind's eye
Move in any possible way that might release them.

NOTE TWO: 04:12

My hips have become tight. When I move my leg but keep my torso still, I can feel the ball of my joint rotating in its socket. I couldn't always feel it; it is something that has developed over time with a pointed focus of mind. Sometimes, I wonder whether it might be fabricated. I have tried to feel it so many times that eventually my brain has created it for me.

This was the case with one of my childhood memories: a lost toy cat on the beach in Norfolk. When I found that they were not true, but recreated incorrectly from a photograph, a question

Creative Writing Gets Different

mark emerged over much of my childhood: what was true from my memory and what was not? One memory in particular plays on my mind: my mother pulling my baby brother from the bath by his hair. In the memory, she lifts him from the bath and down the hallway to his bedroom, screaming. I am too scared to intervene. Is this true? My body gives me clues. Last year on television, a younger sibling was hit by a parent. My visceral reaction was so strong that I left the room and cried. When the song on my son's train won't turn off and my mother sighs with frustration, I rush to be in the room. It is in there, somewhere.

RESPONSE TO NOTE TWO:

I have reread this silently and slowly to myself, many times, and have stored it to return to.

ACADEMIC COMMENTARY: WRITING PROCESS

To resist the patriarchal structures of modern society, women must be awake to their experience. This awareness will breed resistance. It is my suggestion that we might awaken ourselves through a series of exercises:

- Moving meditation
- Exploratory free writing
- Reflection

MOVING MEDITATION

This preparatory stage is intended to provide a gateway to the unconscious mind. I have found through my own practice that after participating in a moving meditation, the thoughts of the mind are more easily accessible. This observation can be connected to Freud's belief (1963) that the unconscious mind holds meaningful and poignant thoughts, which can be accessed through gateways such as 'dreams' and 'slips and errors'. He discovered that these thoughts and feelings, not conscious in the moment, or perhaps ever, were responsible for one's choices. Freud worked predominantly through hypnosis or 'artificially induced amnesia' in the early years of his research. I suggest here

that an individual can use moving meditation to create their own state of hypnosis or dream-like state, after which language is less inhibited and thoughts and feelings that were not previously conscious are more likely to arise. Ted Hughes referred to this as 'outwit the inner police system' whilst Peter Elbow names it the 'inner critic'. Both are finding ways to get around the conscious mind. This strategy is in opposition to a widely accepted writing process by Hayes and Flower (1980) who characterised writers as Mozartians and Beethovians: Mozartians undertook extensive planning, then framed and improved their writing sentence by sentence, with text production and revision undertaken simultaneously (Cremin & Myhill, 2012: 20). By engaging in a moving meditation before writing, a more 'method acting' approach is suggested, which can perhaps be likened to Charlie Parker, who created the blueprint for post-swing jazz improvisation.

In Kolk's book *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014), he explains how 'extreme disconnection from the body' may arise as a coping mechanism during trauma, but can result in a long lasting 'effort to shut off terrifying sensations'. This switching off may 'deaden (a person's) capacity to feel truly alive' (Kolk, 2014: 92), may affect a person's sense of agency in their own life and stop them from being able to 'self regulate' - they are unable to have an awareness of how sensations in their body are connected to their emotions. Kolk's ideas link to those of Peter Elbow in some senses. Elbow begins his book by stating that 'Most people's relationship to the process of writing is one of helplessness' (Elbow, 1998: 45). A sense of agency can be regained by first feeling connected to the moving body, and second by writing to discover. Parents may often feel a sense of 'helplessness' or 'lack of agency' more during parenthood than they ever have before in their lives: the pain of labour, the immersion in a new baby's survival, an overhaul of identity. All of these components, alongside other more genuinely traumatic parts of parenthood such as miscarriages, stillbirth or a complicated labour may all lead to a disconnection between mind and body and therefore a loss of connection to 'self'.

Additionally, language can be difficult to rely upon alone (Dent, 201; Kolk, 2014). Kolk 'learnt that there were pangs too sharp, griefs too deep, ecstasies too high, griefs too deep and a stacked too high for our finite selves to register'. Rather, he suggests that 'we can get past the slipperiness of words by engaging the self-observing, body-based self-system, which speaks through sensations, tone of voice, and body tensions.' The meditations preceding the 'Night Notes' are intended to encourage new mothers to 'listen' or notice the 'body-based system'. The repeated phrase 'Are you breathing? Listen.' (Creative Note #1) encourages the new mother to focus on the physical act of breathing, enabling her to connect to the body. The phrase 'See the bones of your spine in your mind's eye' encourages the new mother to consider how each vertebrate feels, distracting her from the stressors in her life and giving her agency over her body as she feels herself moving each bone.

If set up in this way, the writer will find that they are more connected with the unconscious for the proceeding free write.

EXPLORATORY WRITING

To begin to write, it may be useful to use a part of the body, or a thought that arose during the moving meditation as a springboard. Rather than consciously engaging in a cognitive writing process (Cremin & Myhill, 2012), it is more beneficial for new mothers to take a 'free writing' (Elbow, 1998) 'exploratory' (Bolton, 2011) approach. The purpose is 'expressive' rather than being 'transactional' or 'poetic' (Cremin & Myhill:18). It is not predominantly focused on writing, but on cultivating 'deep listening' of the self and an exposure of the repressed unconscious mind.

Again, the foundations of this perspective can be found in the work of Freud. When describing how he came to discover 'free association', Freud states 'I now asked them to abandon themselves to a process of free association—that is, to say whatever came into their head, while ceasing to give any conscious direction to their thoughts.' (Freud, 1925). He explains that the comments of associations his patients make are not

actually 'free' but are 'determined by a patient's underlying conflict' and that by listening to a patient's 'free associations', it might be possible to infer those conflicts (Brenner, 2017: 5). This discovery was the start of psychoanalysis, and the knowledge that symptoms have meaning has proceeded to permeate society ever since.

In a psychoanalytical writing process, rather than planning, Elbow's 'free writing' technique rejects the 'two-step transaction of meaning into language', and encourages us instead to 'think of writing as an organic, developmental process' (Elbow, 1998: 24). By writing without restraint, and minimising the inner critic, Elbow encourages writers to discover their meaning through their writing, adopting the Freudian belief that any 'free associations' have connected meanings. An exemplification of this might be seen in Night Note One with the comment 'concrete landscape void of beauty'. From this comment, it may be inferred that there is unconscious dissatisfaction living in an urban landscape, or perhaps that the writer is struggling to find beauty or satisfaction in their mental landscape and finds it dull and colourless. Another comment 'There were other women on their lunch break and they smiled at my squeaking, stepping out of my way, adjusting themselves.' might allude to both the alienation felt in society at large as a new mother in 'stepping out of the way', and also to a lack of control, as the writer presents the other women as 'adjusting themselves' though the writer is not able to change her situation. As the writer myself, it is interesting to see these unconscious thoughts arise. Though I wasn't aware of them, I recognise them when they are on the page. Exploratory writing has offered me a voice to shade in the reality that I wasn't even aware was there. This can be linked to feminist theory of self expression, in which art can give a voice to women who feel marginalised and shamed by the patriarchal discourses in society are given a voice (Haeka, 2000; Hogan, S. 1997).

There are five principles of writing which are inherent to Bolton's pedagogy of exploratory writing: trust in explorative and expressive writing, self-respect, responsibility, generosity and

positive regard (Bolton, 2011: 53). These principles provide fertile ground for new mothers to explore their new identity and context within society. They garner only positive outcomes which encourage improvements in mental well being. All of the Night Notes show how the writer has given themselves enough time and space to put into practice Bolton's principles of self-respect and positive regard can be seen here, as the writer is taking the time to write about themselves and explore their condition.

REFLECTION

Reflection is essential if women are to truly examine their unconscious state of being during early motherhood.

Bolton offers a variety of options after a piece of exploratory writing has been done, and she repeats these in every task given in her book, no matter the group: 'reread silently to yourself with care (or store, or even destroy, it). Then share it with a carefully chosen other or group, if appropriate.' (Bolton, 2011). I have found that including questioning in my responses can be helpful. This is inspired by a London based yoga teacher - Rain Maher - who often speaks about questioning the inner dialogue. Elbow (1998) suggests multiple redrafts, allowing the writing to 'evolve' until the true meaning is undiscovered and to therefore find meaning, which can be seen in 'Note Three' below. From the initial premise of 'losing centre' and a new mother grappling with their identity, the reflection is a cathartic acceptance that everything shifts and changes over time and that motherhood is about flexibility and acceptance.

CREATIVE NOTE #3

Meditation

One:

Inhale six,

Exhale six, push air out as your belly button moves towards your spine.

Two:

Inhale six, belly expands.

Exhale six, push air out as your belly button moves towards your spine.

Three:

Inhale six, belly expands.

Exhale six, push air out as your belly button moves towards your spine.

NOTE THREE – 04:15

The way meditation feels can be described, for me, as ‘coming back to centre’. I have used meditation to distance myself from what is happening in my life, and the reminder that my existence continues despite the chaos surrounding me. That feeling of safety that can be found from simply closing your eyes, breathing, and considering a centre, is mysterious and wonderful. I have found myself whilst teaching coming back to that place to gain strength, calm or patience. When a fight is breaking out, or pupils are shouting, a moment taken in this abstract place is incredibly beneficial to the outcome of the situation. This place adapted during pregnancy, as does one's balance on one leg. The centre has shifted, changed its physical location in the body, because now there is a child whose weight is on the front of you and so you must shift your weight accordingly. Labour, for me (and I was lucky to have a smooth one), was a perfect epitomisation of the power of centre. I felt that from a deep almost meditative place, I birthed my son. I began by shouting, making noise, and the midwife showed me a hand motion which was similar to one that yoga teachers use to describe ‘going inside oneself’. It is only from this place, channeling energy into your core, that it felt possible to birth my child.

Confusion came, then, after his birth. What had been part of my balancing act was now external to me. Sometimes in another room, sometimes out on a walk with his grandma. I found that my centre was no longer what it was.

RESPONSE TO NOTE THREE

The walls of our flat move. There are spidery cracks across the walls spanning from top to bottom. One of the cracks runs from the bottom of the staircase all the way to the top. Built in Victorian times, the huge, cumbersome building has been moving with the weather, settling into the ground for more years than any human has been alive. A lady on the street stopped me, once, and told me that her mother had given birth to her sister on our living room floor. We stood beneath a huge sycamore that lined the street and she pointed up to the window as the tree swayed, wiggled, danced in the wind behind us. Is anything truly static?

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, patriarchal structures continue to permeate society and the condition of women, though they are more discreet and are often disguised with the ongoing discourse of empowerment, feminism and choice. I have demonstrated in this assignment that creative writing can have a liberatory effect upon mothers, and can be used as a feminist tool to celebrate motherhood in a genuine, authentic way. This creative writing is best underpinned by pedagogies which have an emancipatory effect in the same way meditation and meditative movement can: free writing, free movement, reflection and self-regard. I have shown how we must step outside of patriarchal modes of thought, which imprison mothers and have a damaging impact on their mental health and perception of self.

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WORKSHOPS AND LESSON PLANS

DIARIES, MEMORIES AND THE SENSES NICOLE FERSKO

CREATIVE RESPONSES TO ACTIVATING MEMORY THROUGH DIARISTIC AND SENSE-FOCUSED WRITING

The selected creative writing responses below make up the mosaic of memories from my own memoir writing journey in engaging and activating my memory through diaristic writing and getting in touch with the senses. I intend to use these excerpts as models in the lesson plan of the workshop I have envisaged.

CATHARTIC WRITING

I never understood what the right way to say goodbye is. The four of us visited all the rooms of the house—the living room, kitchen, the uncared-for garden, and the roof. All these spaces had become empty and silent. There was nothing on the walls anymore and the floors were void of all that provided us warmth—a bed, a closet, a rug. We didn't know what we were leaving behind because the house became empty so quickly. We didn't see things slowly disappear, because everything was rapid. That year things started disappearing before our eyes—our mothers' weight, our father's hair, and myself.

FOOD AND MEMORY:

When I was a child, I sat propped up on the counter dipping my fingers in mascarpone before mom would place it into the fridge. My sibling and I all took turns licking the ladle clean of the creamy custardy cream. That part was almost better than eating the actual tiramisu. Dad was sunny side up eggs guy. The yoke popping out of the whites. Barefoot and in his boxers, He'd yell from the kitchen "who wants eggs?". The boys always walked

Inspiration and Diversity

around barely clothed. Henry used to come out shirtless and grab the jug of milk from the fridge and chug it. Whenever mom would catch him, she'd say "use a cup for god sakes". By the time he heard he was already running away with a milky mischievous moustache.

MUSIC AND MEMORY:

The wood on the patio felt cold against my feet. Dad was firing up the barbeque. "You make me feel so young" by Frank Sinatra was on in the background. I watched him flip the burger patties and they sizzled and oozed out fat. "How do you want your burger?", he asked me. "medium rare", I respond. Ever since I was little, I didn't know what medium rare meant, but that was how dad liked his burgers, and so for the rest of my life that would be how I like mine—juicy, bloody, and tender. He takes the spatula and closes his eyes and sings "you make me feel so young, you make me feel like spring has sprung". I know that song by heart because he always sang it to me.

OBJECTS AND MEMORY:

I unwrap the object wrapped in tissue paper. It was the menorah, the one that he had painted at the pottery studio he always liked to take us too when we were kids. Usually, we would gather around the candle lit menorah in our scooby doo and barney pyjamas. He had taught us the whole prayer which is the only words of Hebrew I know and can recite. Mom was capturing all of it on the VHS tapes. We each took turns lighting one of the eight candles. I remember holding the candle in my hand and lighting the next one. After everyone went off to bed I would stay and watch the candle wax slowly burn.

IMAGES AND MEMORY:

She listens to Wagner joyously swinging her hands in the air as if she is conducting an orchestra and as her body moves more passionately and her voice deepens our dog wags her tail

Creative Writing Gets Different

excitedly. I like to look at this photo because, in that moment, to me, she represents what it means to be alive. I like to think about when she would take me to Carnegie Hall to the opera. My tiny child body didn't fit in the red suede seats. I was not old enough to understand Italian opera. But I could feel her next to me being moved by the voices. I remember when the curtains closed looking up at her and seeing her wipe her eyes and I would start crying too even though I didn't know why.

In the photo of the dead deer the four of us are crouching behind its carcass with maggots feeding on its insides. We were small. It was the first time we saw death. In the photo we are examining every part of its spread-out body from its head to its legs. It reminded me of the way we looked when we were little and how when we slept our breathing bellies went up and down. Except the deer wasn't sleeping and breathing. It was motionless and its black marble eyes were wide open. I didn't understand how it could look so alive and dead at the same time. In the photo my arm is stretched out in front of my brother and sister keeping them from getting any closer.

EXCERPT FROM MEMOIR:

Our mother had always spoken to us in Italian growing up. I can still remember some of my first words: *casa*, *mamma*, *pappa*, *fame*. Most of the Italian I learned was from spending every summer in Italy. Summers in Italy used to mean seeing *nonno* and *nonna*, eating bread with Nutella and drinking iced lemon tea by the lake and walking through *zia* Mari's garden picking apricots and peaches with my cousins. It meant learning how to properly peel fruit with a knife, my aunt's red and white checkered tablecloth, and dipping *pan di stella* biscuits in milk in the mornings. Summers in Trento meant our cousins taught us all the Italian curse words before we even knew them all in English, translating songs by Blink 182 lyrics from English to Italian on paper napkins. It meant learning about how sex worked from my older cousins through elaborate diagrams. Summers in Trento meant running through forests and sitting on wooden benches eating hot polenta out of Styrofoam plates.

OVERVIEW OF THE WORKSHOP

The workshop I have devised is divided into two parts. The first part, “Mosaic of Memories,” is dedicated to getting in touch with memories that make up our personal narrative through different approaches such as diaristic writing, awareness through movement, and sense-focused creative writing exercises. The learning trajectory of this first half of the course is for the designated group to dedicate their space and time to solely learning and observing themselves through author Gillie Bolton’s reflective writing approach. Bolton states that a critical reflective practice consists of three core principals—certain uncertainty, serious playfulness, and unquestioning questioning. The terms are defined as:

Certain uncertainty: “staying with uncertainty is uncomfortable, until the excitement of discovery takes hold.” (30 Bolton)

Serious playfulness: “Looking for something without knowing what it is uncovers pertinent questions.” (30 Bolton)

Unquestioning questioning: “We find out about ourselves by letting go of the everyday assumptions about who we are, in order to be open to the discovery of other possible selves.” (31 Bolton).

These will be the three principals that characterize the first half of the workshop. It will also engage with Francis Gilbert’s approach to “individual sense making”, where he encourages the group “to make sense of the world by thinking through things for themselves” (2 Tool Kit). To go along with these methods, Ultimately, after experimenting with different methods of accessing memory, not only will the participants have generated their own mosaic of memories, but they will have acquired a tool kit to draw from when facing creative blocks or any other challenges in their writing process.

The second part of the workshop, “Shaping Memories into a Compelling Narrative,” will switch gears and invite the participants to take a step back and examine their work with a more critical eye. The purpose is to mould and shape the mosaic of memories into a compelling narrative. Prior to looking at the

Creative Writing Gets Different

work, there will be a week-long break dedicated to a period of purpose-free calm, inspired by suggestions and insights from the global organization, The School of Life. This is so they can see their work from a distance, and ultimately a more critical eye. The final objective is not only to create an anthology of writing in different forms - such as a collection of poems, vignettes, short stories, or a longer piece of writing - but also to experience writing memoir as a healing process. Social psychologist James Pennebaker says that “when you construct a story from a complex event, you make it simpler, you can walk through it more easily, now that you have a nice simple explanation.” (Radio BBC site). Similarly, Bolton states that “our personal values and theories are always embedded in any story we narrate about any incident in our experience.” (Bolton 79). We will keep this in mind as we translate fragments of memory into a coherent body of work.

In order to uncover these qualities that make up a narrative compelling, the participants will take a reflexive and collaborative approach, whereby participants will be paired with others to highlight themes, ideas, and universal qualities each of the stories evoke.

THE BODY AND MEMORY

Body awareness and movement played an integral role in my memoir writing journey. For me, thought requires motion, and by incorporating movement into my creative practice, I found that there was more fluidity and awareness in my writing. I have implemented Feldenkrais exercises throughout the workshop because being in touch with our body's patterns and movements bring us more to the present and makes us feel grounded. Often when working with memory, I have found it challenging to be transported somewhere that can result in feeling stuck in the past. Incorporating movement into the process has made it easier to remain grounded in the present. Since the first half of the workshop is highly introspective and is about exploring undiscovered areas of the mind, I think it's fitting that equal attention should be paid to the body. In author Michael

Richardson's essay "Writing Trauma: Affected in the Act", he suggests that "writers respond *bodily* to the words they write – through breath, tensing of muscles, shifts in facial expression, and so on. Writing entails not only the *expression* of affect, but its *feeling*." (Richardson 157). The Feldenkrais method, a "somatic, or body-oriented, intervention designed to help people reconnect with their bodies and learn ways to move with greater efficiency," is a practice that has greatly enriched my writing experience. This method "uses enhancement of one's awareness to address dormant areas of the self and promote larger and more graceful motions, utilizing the nervous system's own ability to create change and improve movement." These dormant areas of the self, I believe, are inextricably linked to our deep memories.

SELF-DISCOVERY THROUGH DIARY WRITING

Diary writing is another tool that I used to access and explore my memories in a safe and honest way. In *The New Diary* Tristine Rainer states that the diary is a "practical psychological tool that enables you to express feelings without inhibition, recognize and alter self-defeating habits of mind, and come to know and accept that self which is you. It is a sanctuary where all the disparate elements of a life—feelings, thoughts, dreams, hopes, fears, fantasies, practicalities, worries, facts, and intuitions—can merge to give you a sense of wholeness and coherence." In this workshop, the objective is for the participants to become familiar with their personal narrative through keeping a diary and recording their day to day observations of themselves and the world. Rainer's starting points, which guided me as I began diary writing, will serve as encouragement in the workshop:

"[Write] spontaneously: Allow yourself to follow your intuition. Play. Experiment. Let the writing flow without making judgements about yourself." (34 Rainer)

"[Write] honestly: Honesty in a diary has less to do with the "truth" than the way you reveal your "real

Creative Writing Gets Different

self” as distinguished from social roles you play and masks you wear to make an impression.” (35)

“[Value] contradictions: If you are true to yourself within the present moment—that is, writing honestly—you are likely to contradict yourself frequently.”

Tristine Rainer also brings our attention to four natural modes of expression, which are catharsis, description, free-intuitive writing, and reflection. The objective is that the participants will have gained knowledge on these modes of expression and discover which one works best for them.

ACTIVATING MEMORY AND SENSE-FOCUSED WRITING

I discovered that in my memoir writing journey I was able to access memories by responding to music, food, objects, and images. I found that it was a natural method in making the sensory detail in the writing come alive, as well as a vehicle for remembering the past. This is something I’ve incorporated in the lesson plans so that we can be transported to the past through the specific and strong links we have with sensory memories. Exploring the way other writers engage with the senses will make us more aware of how we can do that in our writing, which is why I have included excerpts of writing by memoirists.

TIME FOR MEMORIES TO RESURFACE

The workshop is a month long because the participants will be in three separate but linked modalities through time. The first half is lent to getting in touch with one’s memories through introspective writing exercises and monitoring and observing the body and its movement through the process. The part in between the workshop will be dedicated to what the school of life deems as *a period of purpose free-calm*, where the participants will be encouraged to take distance from their work and lend their attention to activities to keep busy and that allow for day-dreaming thoughts to occur. For example, the shower, doing the washing up, car rides, walking, or anything that keeps the mind busy but gives it room to wander. In the meantime, memories may resurface and

thoughts in the back of their mind will come to the forefront. In my own personal experience, I found that memories need time to evolve, morph, connect, and have a life of their own. The last part will be dedicated to approaching our writing with a critical and collaborative lens. The aim is to look at each mosaic of memories and identify the key themes and ideas, uncovering the story to be told. It will be dedicated to what the school of life calls *tidying up*: translating what appears to be a mess of memories into a coherent and compelling narrative.

PEDAGOGY

Rethinking and exploring my identity as both a writer and teacher informed the making of this workshop. In particular I was influenced by Teresa Cremin and Debra Myhill's perspective on teachers as writers and how by questioning "ourselves as writers, our writing histories, and current practices, we can widen our sense of self as writers and may come to reconceptualise writing in the twenty-first century." (134 Cremin and Myhill). I found this to be insightful upon reflecting on my own approach to teaching memoir and discovered that I can't feel in touch with myself as a teacher unless I myself have practiced, experimented, or engaged with the pedagogies I am teaching.

In thinking about my own writing identity, Francis Gilbert's article 'Why Teach Creative Writing? Examining the Challenges of its Pedagogy' made me reflect upon my own pedagogies and identity as a creative writing educator. I found that in examining the five teaching identities that Gilbert lists - healer, activist, vendor, explorer, and author - I was able to think about the learning trajectory in each moment and be mindful about the kind of teacher I want to be. For example, in the first half of the workshop I would like to act as a healing teacher, focusing on teaching participants how to write for healing. In the second part of the workshop, I would like to take on the author and activist teacher by encouraging the participants to work on the craft of memoir writing and to identify what makes their story universal and highlighting its connective power.

WHO IS THE LESSON PLAN FOR?

The lesson plan aims to reach a wide variety of people who are willing and open to engaging with their own personal narrative through experimental, embodied, and healing creative writing approaches.

LESSON PLANS

WEEK 1, LESSON 1

INTRODUCTION

Learning objectives

The participants will activate their prior knowledge and get to know each other through the senses they associate with the everyday. The overall purpose of the workshop will be discussed together, and any doubts or questions will be cleared up. As a group we will reflect on what a writing space of care and empathy looks like and what boundaries, principles, and rules should be established. The participants will understand the importance of diary writing and self-observation as part of the initial phase to generate their mosaic of memories.

Starter

Write a list of as many sounds, smells, tastes, and sights that make up your everyday. Each participant introduces themselves by sharing their name and list of senses. As the participants share their words the workshop facilitator collects them and displays them for the participants to see. Afterwards the participants must select one of the words from their list that resonates most with them and free write for ten minutes. They are encouraged to explore any memories that come to mind and describe it to the best of their ability. Participants are invited to share their free writings. Only three people can share per exercise in order to give everyone the space to share.

We will explore Tristine Rainer's starting points to writing diary and discuss:

What does a space of care and empathy look like?

Inspiration and Diversity

Participants and facilitator make a list together of the important aspects, rules, and boundaries and reflect on this together.

Participants are encouraged to read *On Keeping a Notebook* by Joan Didion to understand importance and get in the mindset of journaling.

Plenary

What have you learned from this lesson? What do you want to learn more about?

WEEK 1, LESSON 2

THE BODY

Learning objectives

The learning objectives are to access memory through the body, become aware of the body through the Feldenkrais method, and be more aware of how our body influences our writing.

Starter

Feldenkrais grounding exercise:

The ground gives us constant feedback. Lie on the floor and you not only know where you are, but how you are. We can use the concepts of doing and not doing to help explore our “how”. Lie on your back and scan yourself, you will notice a doing (the parts of you that lift or press into the floor) and a not doing (the parts that sink and rest comfortably on the floor). Comparing and contrasting the doing and not doing gives you valuable information of your overall muscle tone. For example, at the beginning of a lesson, you may feel the outer part of your shoulder blade being pulled away from the floor and the inner part pressing into the floor. But by the end of the lesson, you notice less pulling and pressing. You may also notice more of your shoulder blade resting comfortably on the floor. This represents a dramatic change in your nervous system. When you get off the floor, you will probably feel taller and lighter.

Creative Writing Gets Different

The ground is always available for support. Lie on the ground and sense your contact of the floor. There is no place to go. The floor literally has your back (and the rest of you). As you feel the security of the floor, notice how your muscles let go. Focus on this stable contact and you will feel more of yourself sinking and finding stability. The ground is also supportive of our movement. When tilting your legs, how can you find support from the ground to make the movement easier? Noticing how we can find ground support to help us shift, roll, turn, lift or lower ourselves makes life safer, easier and more pleasant.

Write in your journal what you notice about your body after doing this exercise.

Body writing exercise

Take a moment to observe attentively your own hand. Observe it first from a certain distance and then gradually get closer, move it, and listen to the differences you perceive: note down in the first place the physical characteristics, then free yourself from the concreteness of what you've observed and transform the details into something abstract. Free your writing into a story, a poem, or a stream of conscious.

Plenary

What have you learnt about yourself? What do you want to know more about?

WEEK 2, LESSON 3

MEMORY AND SOUND

Learning Objective

The learning objectives are to understand how music is linked to memory, how to incorporate music into life writing, and how sound can be a tool to stimulate memory.

Starter

Think of a song that when you listen to it, it transports you to a moment, a feeling, an emotion. Play that song and listen to it. Absorb all that it makes you feel and pay attention to your body as you listen to it. Pay attention to any specific lyrics that ignite something in you. Write down words that come to your mind as you listen.

Now, in silence free write what comes to your mind. Is there a memory that has formed?

Plenary

What have I learnt so far? What do I want to know more of?

WEEK 2, LESSON 4

FOOD AND MEMORY

Learning Objective

The learning objectives are to see that food is an entry point to memory, understand how to write about food in life writing, and how food plays a large role in personal narrative.

Starter

What is a childhood dish you remember fondly?

Here are some questions to guide participants as they write:

What is it?

What does it look like?

Where were you?

Who are you with?

What does the room look like?

What are the emotions?

How do you remember feeling when eating it?

Excerpts of food in life writing:

Magical Dinners by Chang-Rae Lee from *The New Yorker*

Plenary

What have you learnt so far? What do you want to know more about?

Creative Writing Gets Different

WEEK 3, LESSON 5

IMAGES AND MEMORY

Learning objectives

The learning objectives are how to use images to access memory and how to bring an image to through writing.

Starter

Look at a photo of your choice. Unfreeze the image and write.

Plenary

What have I learnt so far? What do I want to know more of?

WEEK 4, LESSON 6

OBJECTS AND MEMORY

Learning Objective

We can access our memory through objects

Starter

National Writing Project floor plan exercise

Plenary

What have I learnt so far? What do I want to know more of?

BREAK

WEEK 5, LESSON 7

PERIOD OF PURPOSE- FREE CALM WEEK

Learning Objective

To take distance from the work done in previous weeks and engage in purpose-free calm work.

LESSON 8: CONCLUSION

Learning objectives

By the end of the workshop the participants will have gained awareness on how to select memories and what story they want to tell through them. Be able to identify the universal quality of their story that connects them to others. They will have transformed their mosaic of memories into either a collection of poems, vignettes, short stories, or a longer piece of writing that make up the collective anthology.

Participants are asked to step back from their work and imagine they are looking at it from an objective point of view. To make sure that each student gets an objective perspective, each person gets paired with another and is asked to look through their work and respond to these questions:

What are the common themes and ideas present?

Is there a central tone?

Is there a recurring character?

Are there links between these memories? If so, how do you imagine linking them?

What stands out the most in these memories?

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SPACE AND PLACE: DEBORAH FRIEDLAND

ART IN THE PARK

INTRODUCTION

The idea of using sculpture and installation art as a stimulus for creative writing is a response to an exploration of two equally influential focuses in world culture and art. In western philosophy a system of dualism, or the opposites of objects and nature, mind and body, governs much of our perception and culture-making. Meanwhile, 'a non-dual view of the world' is to be found at the heart of many eastern philosophies (Varas and Rispa, 2017, p.6) and in ecological terms, everything is connected. A sculpture park is an environment where these two sets of ideas and forces are given the space to breathe, to converge and to create synergy and it is why they are a personal inspiration.

Any work of art is a product of the artist's unique intellectual and creative concerns but artworks displayed outdoors speak not just to the individual, inviting a personal response. They are also clearly intended to be experienced collectively in a natural and public setting; sculptures have been integrated into gardens since ancient times (Varas and Rispa, 2017, p.10).

Sculpture in the park for me represents a tantalising balance between spontaneous play and skilful creation, social message and aesthetics, ying and yang. It also represents the audaciousness of this type of art – a genre not content to sit quietly on a wall in a hushed gallery, revered and priceless, rather a sense of the gigantic, a merging of technology, craft, myth, industrial technique and materiality shouting its symbolism, its message and its creator's unique vision.

Creative Writing Gets Different

The benefits of time spent outside to our physical health and psychological wellbeing hardly need emphasising. In *The Nature Principle*, Richard Louv (2012) makes a compelling case based on recent research for the power of nature and what he calls 'Vitamin N' (to be prescribed with 'an unlimited refill' (Louv, 2012, p.78) and how connecting to nature boosts mental acuity, health and creativity.

AIMS

The following creative writing workshops are designed to use artworks as a stimulus for discovery of ourselves and our relationship to physical space and nature. The aim is to stimulate participants' imaginations, to explore their inner and outer worlds and to create diverse and exciting writing responses to artworks. I chose some favourite pieces by artists at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park in West Bretton. The 19th century estate comprises 500 hectares of parkland and managed landscape and there are around 100 sculptures on display in the open air. (Varas and Rispa, 2017, p.236) Appendix I contains a list of several more researched conceptual artworks at other locations that could also be used in similar workshops.

Another aim is to consider how words are used in art and how art is used in words. William Blake composed illuminated books and saw 'each poem-picture as an artistic whole' (Benton, 1995, p.74). In the 1970s, Henry Moore responded to poetry by WH Auden in a series of lithographs, 'an expression of landscape inspired by the poetry' (Moore, 2015, p.32). David Hockney (2021) describes a breakthrough in his painting technique that came in 1975 as a result of reading the poem *The Man with a Blue Guitar* by Wallace Stevens. He was thrilled by its premise that 'imagination could transform the world and the way we perceive it' (Hockney 2021, p.173).

Participants will be invited to experiment using the poetic tradition of ekphrasis – a descriptive response to a work of art. 'Through the imaginative act of narrating and reflecting on the "action" of a painting or sculpture, the poet may amplify and expand its meaning.' (www.poetryfoundation.org) Examples such

The Hunters in the Snow by William Carlos Williams about a Brueghel painting (Benton, p77) could be read as inspiration. The Japanese haiku, a poem of seventeen syllables, in three lines of five, seven, and five, traditionally evokes images of the natural world and is a beautiful form to explore (www.poetry.org).

A further aim is to explore how creative writing fosters compassion, empathy, reciprocity and understanding. 'A pedagogy in which dialogue is central: between self and others, between personal and collective knowledge, between present and past, between different ways of making sense' (Alexander, p.5) models these objectives. Facilitators should cultivate an atmosphere in which 'trust and respect are key' while writers need to feel secure 'in the space the facilitator is holding for them.' (Bolton, et al, 2006, p.17)

PHILOSOPHY

As a framework for workshops, I have used these sayings of Rabbi Hillel (110 BCE – 10 CE) ¹

If I am not for myself, who will be for me?

And if I am only for myself, what am I?

And if not now, when?

This widely-quoted aphorism is interpreted in Jewish philosophy as 'finding your unique self and sharing it with the world' (Astor, 2004, www.aish.com). The first question relates to discovery of two parts of the self: 'I' the subject or our deepest sense of self, and 'me', the object, that which exists and is acted upon in the world. (Astor, 2004, www.aish.com) The second question highlights society and our place within it: we each have something to bring to the world and a duty to perform the Jewish concept of 'tikkun olam'. This translates as 'repair the world' and in practice is realised in acts of charity and social action. The visible Japanese repair technique of kintsugi (literally golden joining) is a celebration of 'the life story of the object' (Adamson, 2018, p 61).

¹ (*Ethics of the Fathers* (n.d.) Chapter 1:Verse 14)

Creative Writing Gets Different

In my opinion, every piece of artwork, every piece of writing also gleams brightly as it tells the story of our struggle to repair and be repaired. Finally, with his third question, Hillel asks us to stop procrastinating, follow our dreams and bring our deep need for fulfilment, action and self-actualisation to a reality.

FOCUS AND AUDIENCE

I have designed the workshops for individuals, groups or families visiting the Yorkshire Sculpture Park. The activities are intended to stimulate responses using a range of genres from wordplay and imagery to longer poetry and prose. I invite participants to find a shared experience with the artist, to look together at language and installations playfully, create stories, and consider how the physical artworks interact with their surroundings.

OUTCOME

Three workshops inspired by pieces of installation art by Joana Vasconcelos, Jaume Plensa and Barbara Hepworth. However, the activities and prompts could be adapted to any works of art. I wrote my own responses to the artworks and from there reflected on different ways of inspiring creative writing. The outcomes and designs of the workshop vary accordingly.

THE STUFF OF MYTH AND LEGEND

Ever since ancient times, human beings have put up sculptures in the form of menhirs, totems and other structures. It is hard to imagine these were not a form of artistic expression or worship and it is likely they would have been venues for performance and prayers. Recent research into the acoustics at Stonehenge indicates it was used as an auditorium in which music and speech could have been well amplified (Cox, 2020, p.2). Reaching for a sense of harmony between human consciousness and nature is also an opportunity to explore our relationship with the natural world.

Into this mysterious metaphorical and very present landscape English poet Simon Armitage stepped when he went to live at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park for a year in 2017, 'in search of a more personalised aesthetic' (Armitage, 2019, p. 3). The resulting book

of poetry, Flit, is an inspiring example of the exploration of visual art and the written form where words and objects meet and exchange souls. The poems serve as 'an alternative guidebook' to 'the small mid-European state of Ysp' (Armitage, 2018 p.3) and Armitage creates his own mythology about the artworks there.

Behind me, leaves are notelets passed
from tree to tree through infinite dark,
each new poem never anything less
than a written plea for the next.

Simon Armitage (closing verse of *Émigré*, Flit, 2019, p.40)

THE GIGANTIC

From Ayers Rock in central Australia to Devils' Causeway in Northern Ireland and the giant Sequoia trees of northern California, nature itself is a wonderland of natural phenomena. It provides our imaginations with plenty of opportunity to marvel at the gigantic. In our legends, giant creatures such as Cyclops loom large while in literature Gulliver is a giant to the Lilliputians. In Cerne Abbas in Dorset, the ancient figure of a naked man is carved into the chalk hill, most likely from the Saxon period. (www.nationaltrust.org.uk). These representations of giants in art, folklore and in nature exist all over the world. In post-industrial times, architecture, statues and monuments (think Eiffel Tower, Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro) also place us in the sightline of giants and their dreams. When we encounter them we are taken aback and intrigued; we re-evaluate our concept of space and the proportion that our bodies occupy and experience.

In her exploration of the gigantic in *On Longing*, Susan Stewart asserts that, 'the aesthetic experience of the sublime is characterised by astonishment and surprise; the grandeur of scenery results in a sudden expansion of the soul and the emotions.' (Stewart, 1992, p.75) Modern art favours the gigantic because it changes our perspective; installations offer us hyperbole, the fantastic, at times a manifestation of Bakhtin's carnivalesque (Stewart, 1992, p.80). They also invite us to question what we are seeing and enter into a transcendent world

of the unknown rather than a world of control and finite boundaries. The digital world has miniaturised much of what we experience; almost everything is rendered small on a computer screen and technological gadgets have become ever smaller and streamlined by design. 'Whereas the miniature represents closure, interiority, the domestic and the overly cultural, the gigantic represents infinity, exteriority, the public and the overly natural.' (Stewart, 1992, p.70)

Art critic John Berger explains how 'we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves' (Berger, 1972, p.9). What we see is brought within our reach by the fundamental 'reciprocal nature of vision' (I can see the sculpture and from the sculpture's vantage point, I can be seen). With these 'ways of seeing' in mind, and an understanding that 'we explain the world with words' (Berger, 1972, p.7) gigantic sculpture and art in an outdoor setting has the power to radically alter our consciousness and excite our writerly imagination.

WRITING RESPONSES TO ARTWORK

As human beings, we have a strong connection to objects. We learn to make them with tools and from this process we acquire 'material intelligence' (Adamson, 2018, p.47). For installation artists a material such as stone or metal is 'fully legible only once you understand something of its nature' (Adamson, 2018, p.47). Bolton (2011, p.59) argues that 'the writer does not begin with thoughts and ideas, but observation and images: things.' Language is the conduit for these observations and we too need tools with which to carve our responses. An aid in this process is to practise uncensored freewriting which the Warmers in the workshops invite participants to try. The key is avoiding interruptions, hesitations and self-criticism. Freewriting is 'a natural way of producing a sound, a texture, a rhythm – a voice – which is the main source of power in writing' (Elbow, 1998, p.6). Writing without stopping or thinking too much allows us to 'pay deep attention to parts of ourselves we do not listen to often enough' (Bolton, 2006 p.116, p 136). Crafting a piece of writing can then follow with increased confidence.

SOME SUGGESTIONS TO THESE AIMS ARE LISTED HERE:

Describe the artwork in detail using each of your senses (use the present tense)

Record sensory responses (engaging as many of the senses as are available to you) to the materials: touch (if allowed), sound, sight, smell, taste (imagine). Will these change at different times of day?

Describe and imagine what is beyond the artwork (physically, metaphorically)

Make the object speak (personification is a way to unlock the silence of the artwork's imposing appearance)

Align with your dreams, nightmares, deepest emotions, memories, imagination while contemplating the artwork

Look for words that are light or dark, can be found where the spaces are and where they rest on a surface

Turn critical thinking questions into creative responses: a call and response folk song

Report on your encounter with the materials

Observe your reaction to the setting, other visitors

Use the artwork as a stimulus to write a fairy tale, myth or legend

Write responses in the form of text messages (each participant writes a message and then assemble them into dialogue)

Imagine conversations between the artwork and/or viewer and maker

Comment using different forms: dialogue, news story, nursery rhyme, letter, monologue

Play with literary devices: alliteration, metaphor, simile

TEACHING THEORY

As a strong advocate of informal education, I believe in the power of learning in unconventional places and the outdoors. Accepting that 'education whether formal or informal, should have at its heart the practice of dialogic enquiry' (Ash et al, 2007, p. 35) a museum, gallery or sculpture park is an ideal setting for exploring creativity. Participants are focusing on fun and imagination, not a classroom lesson. By engaging with the artworks they will be actively constructing their own meanings and symbolism (Ash et al, 2007, p. 36) while art-making themselves through creative writing.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The photographs provided stand in for the artworks for this assignment. The workshops could be adapted and carried out with other works of art at a sculpture park. While online may be the only option in circumstances such as a pandemic lockdown, I would avoid doing the workshops virtually. It is ironic that the term digital is etymologically connected with our ten fingers: only in the natural, real world can we physically touch a work of art and engage all of the senses (Adamson, 2018, pp.99-103).

THE WORKSHOPS

WORKSHOP 1

The focus is two installation artworks by Joana Vasconcelos. Her work is a celebration of culture and femaleness. It challenges our expectations of familiar objects and makes insightful and often amusing observations on the dynamics of the Western world. (YSP Exhibition Guide, 2020, p.6)

WORKSHOP 2

Letters, words and poetry are essential elements of Jaume Plensa's work. He encourages tactile and sensory exploration. His work includes a 50-metre curtain of poetry made of suspended steel letters, large, illuminated sculptures in the landscape, and engraved gongs that visitors could strike to fill the gallery with sound. In an interview for his 2011-2012 Yorkshire Sculpture Park exhibition, Plensa explains his motivation:

I grew up surrounded by text. ... I was passionate not only about words but also about the biological function of one letter. That means one letter alone seems nothing but together with others they could build up more complex bodies like one word. One word with another word – text. Text with text – that means that from the most smallest to the greatest ... I guess a letter or a word. It's a beautiful metaphor about life and maybe humanity because we alone – it seems that we are nothing but together we could do a community. (yvsp.org.uk/films/jaume-plensa-interview)

WORKSHOP 3

Barbara Hepworth completed *The Family of Man* in 1970. These nine upright figures resemble one another like members of a family. The work is not only a universal survey of humanity but also a personal history. Hepworth chose not to create literal representations of the world but developed abstract forms inspired by people and landscapes. (www.ysp.com/hepworth)

THREE WORKSHOPS

1 IF I AM NOT FOR MYSELF, WHO WILL BE FOR ME?



FIGURE 1: *SOLITAIRE* VASCONCELOS (2018)

The seven-metre high *Solitario* (*Solitaire*) 2018 brings together symbols of a perceived luxurious lifestyle. With a 'diamond' formed of crystal whisky glasses sitting on top of a ring of gold alloy car wheel rims. *Solitario* is a statement of a stereotypical universal desire to acquire material possessions and wealth. (YSP Information on display)

Creative Writing Gets Different

I used freewriting to respond to this artwork. The first was a poem about a symbolic loss. The second was in reaction to the impressive size of the ring. The third is flash fiction, a comment perhaps, on the way relationships have become public through social media and current concerns of ethical consumerism.

Where did it all go?

I lost my ring
in the grass
I frantically hunted through the wet blades
I knew it was the end
The gods were telling me.
I saw a bunch of ants, an upside-down louse and a spider
trapezing across the rose bush.
Everything was in full growth,
The season for plans, and budding romance
but there I was on my knees, the earth clumps of inedible cake
falling from my fingers
one miserable outcome on my mind:
divorce.

Wow!
a ring as big as a house
as big as a swimming pool
all those glasses balancing like a spectacular Busby Berkley
moment: ta-dah!
a giantess left it there running home at midnight
or just a fool in love who liked making grand gestures

Critical Thinking

'Where did the gold come from?' Venisha asked critically. 'I hope it was mined from an ethical source.' Jonathan's eyes flared up into lumps of shame and the tears came up in his throat like that noisy plumbing from the flat next door. He frantically started tapping: Do I really want to marry this girl?' Wait for the replies to pop up on the screen before answering.

SOLITAIRE WORKSHOP

Timings are flexible. A larger group could be divided with each group focusing on one writing activity.

Warmer

Work through the questions or choose one or two questions only.

What is the solitaire made of?

Stand far away and write a short description. Then stand close up and write another description. Are the descriptions similar? How do they differ?

How does solitaire interact with the nature around it?

Writing prompts

1 Describe your reaction to seeing Solitaire for the first time.

2 Write a mythological story about how the ring came to be there. These prompts can be used or have participants write their own starter sentences on cards to give to others.

It was a dark and stormy night ...

Long ago, when on every horizon there was a pointy mountain and in every castle there was ...

Giselda was in a bad mood that day.

I was just a simple blade of grass until ...

3 Write a 50-word flash fiction story about Solitaire.

4 Write an ode to Solitaire.

Cooler

Share experiences and writing in a mingling activity at the end.



FIGURE 2: *MARILYN VASCONCELOS* (2011)

Vasconcelos's giant pair of stilettos is 'a delightful disruption' of our expectations. As viewers walk towards the shoes, the steel catches the light and shines in every direction. A familiar everyday object, a saucepan is associated with the simultaneous drudgery and creativity of cooking. The shoes are 'a statement of femininity and strength.' (Exhibition Guide, p. 29-30)

My creative pieces helped generate questions for participants.

Shoes are a feminist saucepan

(after *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, Susie Orbach)

I thought of writing the story of my life in shoes. Those button shoes I bought from the ballet shop Anello and Davide in Covent Garden when I was 15. The bright green Olaf daughter lace-up boots that were stolen at a party in Bedfordshire. Afterwards M and I and my Aussie friends who were visiting went boating, the photo shows how hung over we were – black kohl eyeliner off its perfect tracks from the night before. Then there were those ridiculously expensive soft leather strappy high heels I bought for a job interview in a fancy restaurant but I couldn't stay on my feet

in them all day. I keep my proud collection in boxes under the bed, the silent chroniclers of days gone by.

Nowadays I mostly wear flats, which luckily are in fashion, ever since I broke a bone in my foot stumbling in the dark at the Dead Sea. What is it about shoes and sexiness, attractiveness, femininity? What does it mean to be a contemporary woman in the bustling cauldron of cultures we jump in and out of in this hyperconnected world? Our private and public identities are reflected in the shiny stainless steel of the looming stilettos, the domestic domain, the world of work, the red-carpet glamour of celebrity and fame.

Bruce Chatwin in *Songlines* talks about walking and how we are nomads, how we mimic the internalised rhythm of ancient footsteps when we rock the cradle, when we take to the road, how we are destined to walk in search of the bigger sky. My son gets that from me, he just wants to travel. His boots were stolen from outside his tent in New Zealand. Yes, I am one of those women who cares about shoes. When I used to visit my friend Susie and we went for a ramble up on Stanage Edge, she teased me about not having appropriate footwear. But I've learned since then. I will not measure out my life in saucepans: how many onions I've peeled, how many dinners I've cooked, how many pots I've scrubbed, how many fancy pairs of shoes I own but do not wear as there are no longer any parties to go to. I've bought some proper hiking boots and a new backpack. They can all wash up their own pots and pans from now on.

SHOES WORKSHOP

Participants are invited to think about the questions and then write a response. There are three activities to choose from depending on time and audience.

Warmer

Think about each question for 1-2 minutes or choose one question to discuss and make notes. Elicit brief whole group feedback.

Walk around the artwork and look at it closely.

Close your eyes and imagine picking up one of the saucepans or lids. What is it made of? How does the surface feel? Is it heavy or light? Does it have a smell?

Think of more uses for the saucepan other than cooking (e.g. catching drips under a leaky ceiling, etc.)

How do you think the artist constructed the artwork? Why?

Imagine the artwork was constructed with a different material. How would that change it, your perceptions and the type of shoes?

What is the message?

Use your notes from the Warmer and write for six minutes.

1 Anthropomorphosis

Write a story from the point of view of a saucepan eg a blog entry about your life.

Cooler

Share writing in small closed or whole group feedback.

2 Why did I start this?!

A Write a diary entry by the artist about the personal and practical challenges of making this artwork.

B Write an interview with the artist about why and how she made this artwork.

Cooler

Role-play the artist talking about the artwork or act out your interview.

3 What big shoes you have, Grandma!

Warmer

Put these questions on cards and distribute. Give out blank cards for participants to write their own questions. Conduct a three-minute milling activity where they walk around asking and answering questions.

What do the shoes in the artwork represent for you?

What do women/men like about shoes?

Did you get to choose your own shoes as a child? Was this important, or not?

Writing Prompts

1 Write a story from the point of view of the installation or any other pair of shoes.

2 Write an ode or other type of poem to honour a pair of shoes you love.

3 Think about a fairy tale you know involving shoes (e.g. The Elves and the Shoemaker) Rewrite the fairy tale placing the installation shoes in the story.

Cooler

Share writing in small closed or whole group feedback.

2 AND IF I AM ONLY FOR MYSELF, WHAT AM I?



FIGURE 3: 29 PALMS PLENSA (2011)

This artwork is made from excerpts of a selection of poems and texts that have influenced the artist. The letters are cut from stainless steel and make a clinking sound as they are touched.

My response to this artwork was two ekphrastic poems.

Haiku

We stand together
like paper dolls linking hands
in the rain our prayers

Twentynine Palms

Stainless steel letters suspended from the ceiling.
From a distance they look like chainmail,
a shimmering armour for the clouds.

The ground is dusted with shadows
an evanescent array
of mirrored thoughts.

Here is a tailor who stitches words,
slowly your touch dissolves
their soft metallic breath
as you walk through
a synergy of dainty echo
and silver light.

POETRY CURTAIN WORKSHOP

A children's / family workshop. Do the Warmer first, then conduct a 'carousel' with the four activities set up at different writing stations. Participants move from activity to activity or choose just one depending on time.

Warmer

Walk slowly around the poetry curtain.
What words can you see?
Touch the letters. Describe how they feel.
How do the letters sound when they move in the wind?
What letters, or words can you see reflected in the shadows?

Writing Activities

I Make a Word Farm

Materials: Plain coloured card, lolly sticks, scissors, glue, seed trays, garden compost, small toy mini-beasts.

Write individual words on cards/lolly sticks in response to any of the artworks.

Creative Writing Gets Different

Put the words in a box.

Close eyes and pick out letters or words cards.

Assemble letters into words, words into phrases / mini poems.

'Plant' the letters / words in trays and decorate with mini-beast cut-outs and paper leaves and flowers.

2 Create Ekphrastic Wordles

Write an ekphrastic poem such as a haiku about the artwork.

Go online to create a wordle with your poem which on many websites are free to save. Alternatively, it can be done analogue style with paper, scissors, glue and coloured pencils. Simply write out the words in different sizes, cut them out and rearrange them, then glue and colour.



FIGURE 4: *HAIKU WORDLE* (2021)

3 Make 'Found' Poetry Rainmakers

Props: clean clear bottles. Card. Coloured beads.

Walk around the artwork and find words or parts of words in the poetry curtain.

Write down the words and make them into poems. Cut the poems up and put the words and some beads into bottles. Close firmly.

Shake your Poetry Rainmaker. Can you remember your poem?

How does it sound?

4 Sing-song

Write the song the letters are singing.

PERFORMANCE

Stand in a line and form a 'poetry curtain'. Take turns to sing songs, read poetry aloud or shake your poem rainmaker.



FIGURE 5: *SOUL I, II AND III* JAUME PLENSA (2010)

I wrote one poem asking myself what the message is.

HaShem: The Name

In Jewish tradition the name of God is considered too holy to utter, therefore it is often referred to simply as 'The Name'.

It used to be the threat of an enormous mushroom cloud
ballooning above the earth
that scared us most

Creative Writing Gets Different

now it is a microscopic virus
equally unstoppable, just as much a result
of human folly.

There is no one left
but here we perch
we three
wise elders,
knees up in thought
scanning the horizon for something whole
something to heal all the broken souls.

My body is a cocktail of letters
sharp corners, rounded edges, a library of bound characters and
symbols
in a giant metal body bag
the Ss and the Os holding up my fractured face
and the U like arms reaching for God.
The L is straight and open, the potential to enter a sublime space

whatever language is in me is can be assembled
the letters can be found
if only we knew how to speak the name

SOUL WORKSHOP

Discussion

Why has the artist created this work? Does it have a message?

Writing prompts

If you were in this artwork, where would you be? What would you like to say to the others (Soul I, II and III)?

Walk around the artwork slowly. Note ten words to describe what you see in detail.

How does the landscape complement the figures?

Imagine the artwork at night and describe it, using your senses: light, touch, sound, smell.

Inspiration and Diversity

What was happening before Soul I, II and III appeared on the landscape?

Use Rabbi Hillel's saying as a title for reflective writing: If I am only for myself, what am I?

Reflection

Sit on the ground in groups of three. Read your work to each other.

3 AND IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

I wrote two poems about this series of nine sculptures by Barbara Hepworth which I imagined to be like robots.



FIGURE 6: *FAMILY OF MAN* HEPWORTH (1970)

Family of Man I

I scan the sky for some truth
But my antennae are pointing sideways
and don't pick up the words
They are on the wrong frequency.

The humans they search for truth
Then they say 'Go away, I'm looking for the truth²'
whenever it knocks on the door.
But they are very good at lies
and at hurting each other.

Family of Man 2

People have come to see me
They approach cautiously at first
If I twist my head and look down
I can see mothers and babies
I hear kisses
But the rest of them, the children 'trailing clouds of glory³'
they are just
tickling my sea-green belly and making me laugh

I wish all the mendacity
would get trapped inside the large printer's O
of my lower chakra
and dissolve at once into butterfly hearts

² Pirsig, R. (1974) *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

³ Wordsworth, W. (1815) *Intimations of Immortality* (Line 65)



FIGURE 7: *FAMILY OF MAN* HEPWORTH (1970)

ROBOTS WORKSHOP

This following activity was inspired by a workshop created by Helen Boden (Bolton et al, 2006, pp.87-89).

Materials: pens/pencils and notebooks or clipboards to enable writing outside.

Heart opener

Spread out and stand in a circle around or near the different sculptures in this group. Be ready to spend 5-10 minutes doing some yoga poses.

1 Mountain pose

Stand tall with feet together and weight distributed evenly. Hands loosely to the side of the body and palms facing forward. Relax neck and shoulders, hug the lower ribs in focus on creating stability. Soften the gaze and breathe in and out slowly and deeply.

2 Palm tree standing pose

Stand in Mountain Pose. Raise arms slowly above the head with palms together and point fingers upwards. Drop shoulders and keep neck relaxed. Focus on breathing in and out. How does the fresh air feel?

3 One legged tree pose

Stand in Mountain Pose. Slowly lift one leg and place foot on the opposite foot, shin or thigh. Focus on something a little in the distance to steady the gaze. Raise hands above head, relaxing shoulders and neck. Focus on oppositions of balance and hold pose for 10-30 seconds. Slowly lower the raised leg and repeat on the other side of the body.

4 Five-pointed star pose

Stand with feet wide apart and feet rooted calmly in the earth. Relax and pull shoulders back, avoid crunching in the neck and shoulders. Raise arms to the side with palms facing down. Feel the five points of a star in your body as you breathe deeply and slowly.

Breathe in the landscape.

Optional: say affirmations either quietly or loudly: I am tall. I am strong (own adjectives).

Action

1 Start walking very slowly around the Family of Man. Stop in front of each figure and walk all the way around it, noticing as much detail as possible.

Consider where the sculptures are in relation to each other and where the artist placed them outside. Why are they in the park? Write down adjectives describing it using these categories: colour, material, texture, surface, shape, size, sound (e.g. green, bronze, jagged, smooth, convex, tall, loud)

2 Practice one of the yoga poses adopted earlier and connect it to one of the adjectives you have used in Activity 1.

3 Make a new list of five concrete or abstract nouns to describe the sculptures (e.g. robot, man, tower, mother, engine; mystery, intelligence, language, reflection, solidity)

4 Work with another participant or in groups and create five phrases with adjectives and nouns from your lists. (e.g. (a/an) green tower, jagged language, tall reflection, bronze solidity, loud robot)

5 Write poems using your phrases and add more words.

Closing

Face the sculpture that inspired your poem. Read your poem aloud to it. What does he/she/they/it say back to you?

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PHOTOS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

- Figure 1: Vasconcelos, J. (2018) *Solitaire* Photo D Friedland July 2020 Yorkshire Sculpture Park
- Figure 2: Vasconcelos, J. (2011) *Marilyn* Photo D Friedland July 2020 at: Yorkshire Sculpture Park
- Figure 3: 29 Palms Plensa, J. (2011) accessed 9.05.21 at: www.jaumeplensa.com/exhibitions-and-projects/ exhibitions/
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- Figure 4: Wordle of Haiku Created by D Friedland on at www.worditout.com accessed September 2022)
- Figure 5: Plensa, J. Soul I, II and III accessed 9.05.21 at: www.jaumeplensa.com/exhibitions-and-projects/ exhibitions/
jaumeplensa-yorkshire
- Figure 6: Hepworth, B. (1970) Family of Man Photo D Friedland 29.07.20 at: Yorkshire Sculpture Park
- Figure 7: Hepworth, B. (1970) Family of Man Photo D Friedland 29.07.20 at: Yorkshire Sculpture Park

CREATIVE WAYS OF TEACHING ESL STUDENTS: TAMADER ISSA

EXAMPLE #1: A CREATIVE RESPONSE TO *RADIO SILENCE* BY ALICE OSEMAN

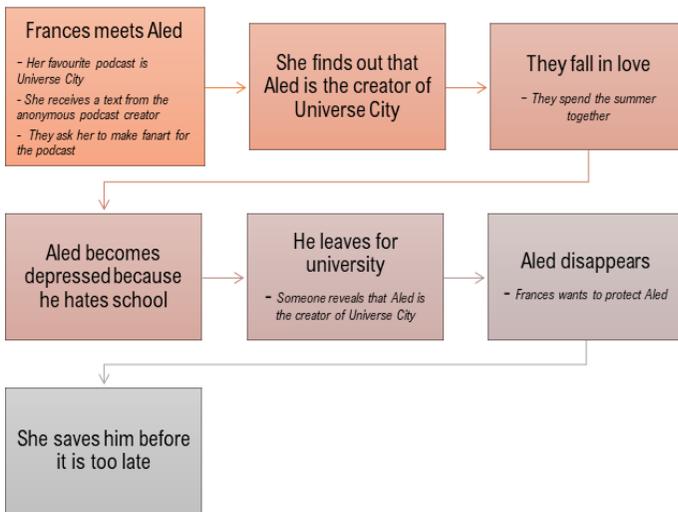


FIGURE 1: A PLOT SUMMARY OF *RADIO SILENCE* BY ALICE OSEMAN

This is an imaginary student who goes by the pseudonym 'Cyrene the Conqueror'. They live in Benghazi, Libya, and love creating stories. They have read Radio Silence by Alice Oseman and decided to draw this timeline as a book summary. However, they have made one mistake in this figure.

Creative Writing Gets Different

- A. Try to guess the mistake, then **CLICK HERE** to find out the correct answer.
- B. Now draw your own timeline summary for the plot of Radio Silence and post it on the Forum!
- C. Attempt drawing a Role-on-the-wall for a character of your own choice from Radio Silence.

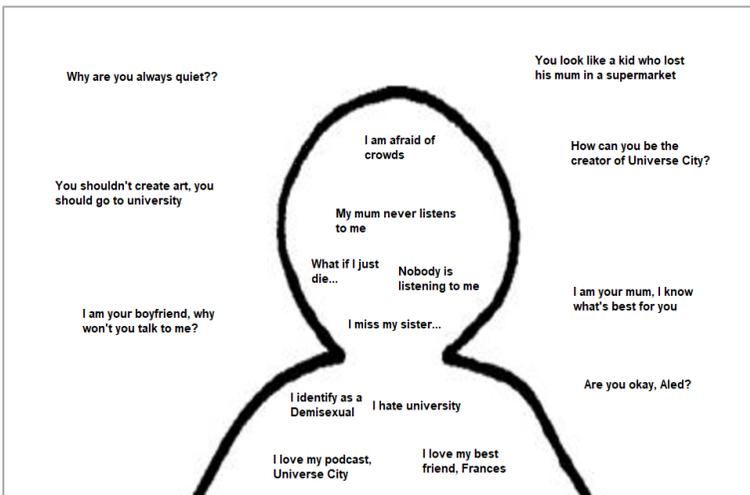


FIGURE 1: A ROLE-ON-THE-WALL ILLUSTRATION OF ALED LAST FROM *RADIO SILENCE* BY ALICE OSEMAN

Cyrene the Conqueror drew a Role-on-the-wall for Aled Last to reflect effectively on the character and their world. They include an account of the outer and inner worlds of Aled Last. This means that Aled's thoughts and feelings appear inside the figure, whereas others' thoughts and attitudes towards him are written outside of the figure.

Cyrene the Conqueror did some freewriting in response to *Radio Silence*. They reflect on their personal experience, similar to the main character 'Aled Last', as they share the same passion for digital storytelling.

CYRENE THE CONQUEROR'S FREEWRITING

I want to tell Aled about my secrets. I want to discuss the similarities between us because I relate deeply to his struggles, especially his worries about the future and his friends. I want to start a blog where I publish a series of fictional stories set in a futuristic Libyan world. It is quite similar to Aled's podcast since he created the podcast as a way to make sense of his own world. I feel the same way; I want to start my own fictional world because I want to be heard and noticed.

Usually, whenever I want to speak, no one is listening to me. I sit at the table during family gatherings, and all I hear is silence. Even though silence here isn't really silence. I hear white noise – my siblings bragging about their school achievements and my mum smiling ear to ear because she appreciates their respect for academia.

I hate it. I hate being silenced and receiving only silence when I say something about my art or my passion for creating fantastical worlds. 'Why do you have strange thoughts?' my mum would ask me whenever I mention my interests. It is unbelievably unfair how she differentiates between her own children – one gets recognition, and the other is completely dismissed.

I wish I could disappear into my own world and dive deeper and deeper into my own happiness and self-appreciation – maybe then I will be happy and welcomed. Maybe then I will hear more... I will hear loud voices – voices just like mine and just like Aled, radio silence and everything in between.

D. After choosing a character in Radio Silence, write a freewriting response to describe how similar your experience is to them. Share your freewriting responses with your WhatsApp group. Post your progress on the Forum!

Cyrene the Conqueror wrote a letter to Aled explaining their experience in depth. It is inspired by the style of Universe City chapters in Radio Silence. In this letter, Cyrene the Conqueror is able to speak directly to Aled as if he were a real character and not a fictional character in Radio Silence.

THE LETTER

In Distress. Stuck in Libya. Send Help.

April 16th, 2021

Dear Aled,

I hope you are listening... or reading. I know this letter might be outdated because this is not via your preferred way of communication – the internet. I am writing this letter to tell you a secret.

I am, too, wondering if somebody is listening to my voice. Sometimes, I feel like nobody is listening to me, just like your podcast character, Radio Silence, who is stuck in Universe City.

I am stuck here – in another world, not in Universe City, but in Libya.

No matter how hard I try to fit in, it gets worse than before. My own parents don't want to understand me – they never try to. They want me to study hard to become a doctor in the future, but I hate school. I enjoy making art and storytelling. I want to create my own world where I can be powerful enough to be heard and appreciated.

When I read Radio Silence and listened to the podcast on YouTube, I felt heard. I finally understood the power of art and how it can actually make a noise. It gave me hope and made me more determined to push forward, even if I had to stand against my own family. Eventually, they'll understand my intentions and goals.

I want you to know that you are not alone, Aled. We are all struggling with you – in this world, it is hard for us to exist without getting a degree or a decent job, but art lovers live longer, and they know how to be happy.

I wish you all the happiness in the world because you deserve it.

Stay creative, Aled.

Yours sincerely,

Cyrene the Conqueror

E. Handwrite a letter to the character of your choice in Radio Silence. You should inspire the language and style of the letter based on the aesthetics of the book's writing style.

EXAMPLE #2: A CREATIVE RESPONSE TO ALL THE THINGS WE NEVER SAID BY YASMIN RAHMAN

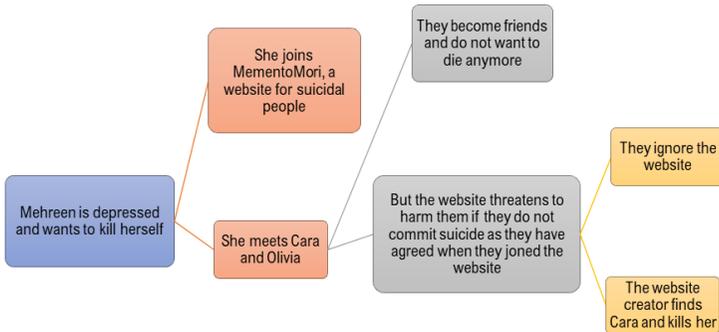


FIGURE 2: A PLOT SUMMARY OF *ALL THE THINGS WE NEVER SAID* BY YASMIN RAHMAN

This is an imaginary student who is known by their username 'depressed_teen2004'. They live in Tripoli, Libya. They have been battling with depression for a long time. They have read *All The Things We Never Said* by Yasmin Rahman and summarised the book's plot in the following figure. However, depressed_teen2004 made two mistakes in their book summary.

- A. Try to guess the mistakes, then **CLICK HERE** to find out the correct answer.
- B. Now draw your own timeline for the plot of *All The Things We Never Said* and post it on the Forum!
- C. Attempt drawing a Role-on-the-wall for a character of your own choice from *All The Things We Never Said*.

depressed_teen2004 drew a Role-on-the-wall for Mehreen to reflect effectively on the character and their world. They include an account of the outer and inner worlds of Mehreen. This means that Mehreen's dark thoughts and feelings appear inside the figure, whereas others' words towards her are drawn outside of

Creative Writing Gets Different

the figure. depressed_teen2004 did some freewriting in response to *All The Things We Never Said*.

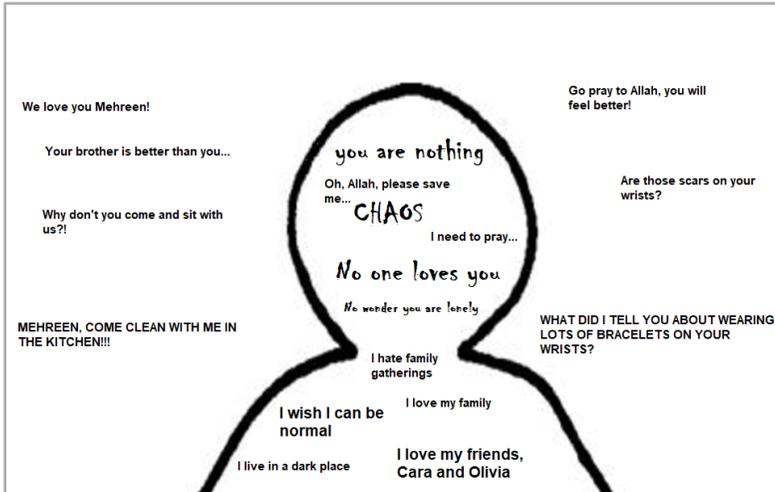


FIGURE 3 A ROLE-ON-THE-WALL ILLUSTRATION OF MEHREEN FROM *ALL THE THINGS WE NEVER SAID* BY YASMIN RAHMAN

depressed_teen2004 did some freewriting in response to *All The Things We Never Said*. This reflects their reading experience as they share their personal struggles with depression since the book's main theme is mental health, such as depression, self-harm, and anxiety.

DEPRESSED_TEEN2004'S FREEWRITING

This book spoke to me better than any human could. Mehreen, Olivia and Cara felt like my own best friends. I wish I were there with them because I am depressed too. I have become used to seeing bombs dropping in our neighbourhood. People screaming in the distance is all I hear daily — children with no parents and parents with no children. My friends stopped going to school.

They have lost their motivation for education and their sense of safety. Most of them have moved to their hometowns to stay with their extended families.

This civil war has torn us apart – everything is split into pieces. Even humans are shattered and scarred, including me. I am 17 and suicidal. It is hard for me to believe that the hopeful and optimistic soul I used to have is now just a dark soul wandering in an empty world. Nothing can put a smile on my face nor heal my wounds.

Yet this book made me realize how a friendship can save you from ending your life. When the adults don't realize how serious depression is for young people, like me and the main characters, we seek alternative ways to be heard and saved – that place might be the internet. That is why I sought digital friendships, people that could understand my nightmare.

I related the most to Mehreen because she's Muslim who struggles in silence. Her faith is strong, but she can't heal herself through religion alone. She must find another way – a more suitable way for her serious stage of depression. I am not at the same stage of depression, but I am scared that one day I might reach it...

- D. Choose a character from *All The Things We Never Said*. Write a freewriting response to describe how similar your experience is to them. Share your freewriting responses with your WhatsApp group. Post your progress on the Forum!

depressed_teen2004 wrote an email to Mehreen talking about their experience with depression and friendship as a form of therapy. It is an email instead of a handwritten letter because it is inspired by the style of emails shared as a form of communication between Mehreen, Cara and Olivia. In this email, depressed_teen2004 shares their perspective of being a Muslim teenager who is lost and helpless.

From: depressed_teen2004@gmail.com
To: mehreenmiah@hotmail.co.uk
Subject: I want to be your friend
Date Sent: 04/22/2021

Creative Writing Gets Different

Hi Mehreen,

I wanted to let you know that I am proud of you. You are patient, strong and kind. You try so hard to stay alive. Your friends, Cara and Olivia, are special too. They are great examples of good friends – the best kind of friends. Even though you met through a virtual ‘suicide pact’ on the MementoMori website, your friendship was meant to happen. It’s crazy how your friendship started, but it made me reach out to online support groups for people my age, and I think it’s working!

I met a girl online on a Facebook group for depressed teenagers. I found her in the comments section, where she introduced herself as a victim of the Libyan civil war. She lost her brother in the civil war a few months ago. Her name is Eman which means ‘faith’ in Arabic – ironic, I know! She has attempted suicide twice. Her mum saved her twice and decided to seek medical help. They told her that her daughter suffers from a severe case of PTSD, which is the main cause of her depression. My new friend is a bit better now after receiving help and therapy.

I, on the other hand, have been struggling with general anxiety and depression. I don’t think it’s because of the war since I wasn’t really affected mentally. I had other issues, primarily social and mental traumas at home and during my childhood. My parents never notice my mental battles. They think I am just a spoiled teenager. ‘Stop causing drama and thank Allah that you are blessed with a home and a family,’ they’d say whenever I wanted to talk about my depression.

I never give up. I keep telling my parents about my negative thoughts, but they tell me to pray and ask Allah for strength – just like what your parents advise you to do, Mehreen. I love Allah, and I believe in Him, I do. But whenever I pray for Him to relieve my pain, I get stuck and only temporary peace is granted. This led me to realize that mental health is as important as physical health. When someone gets sick, they seek medical health. Why does an illness have to be physical to be approved for medical help? I don’t get it.

I always ask my parents this question, yet they never take me seriously. However, my new friend is helping me deal with my mental illness. We meet once a week via a video call where we share personal experiences with anxiety and depression. We

write about it in a reflective journal too, that's why I am enjoying writing this email to you. You feel like a friend.

I hope that you are safe now.

Please write back to me! It would mean the world to me if we became friends. I believe we can survive this nightmare together.

Best wishes,

depressed_teen2004

- E. Write an email to the character you have chosen in *All The Things We Never Said*. You should inspire the language and style of the email based on the emails exchanged between the three main characters.

Workshop outline

This is a creative guide for teachers interested in following this letter-writing workshop for young people, particularly ESL students aged 17-22. This workshop celebrates reflective writing in the form of letter-writing and reading Young Adult books. Students must read a YA book of their choice and write a letter directed to a character in the book they had read to interact with the book and practise reflective writing.

SETTING STUDENTS INTO GROUPS

Before starting the workshop, the students need to be divided into groups. This workshop is designed for a number of 16 students in total, so each group consists of four students. Each group will have four roles assigned to the members of the group. As a teacher, you must acknowledge these roles and assign them to the right students to achieve a balanced communication and student engagement level. These four groups will take place on WhatsApp. In the following diagram, the roles needed for each group is illustrated.

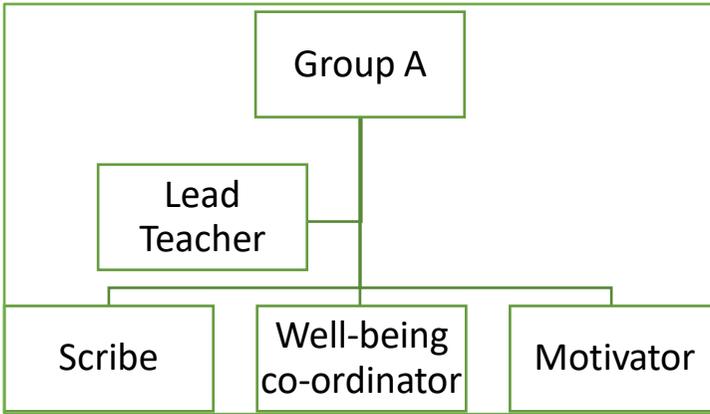


FIGURE 5: GROUP ROLES

SESSION OUTLINE

This workshop should be taught through three main sessions. Each session will follow a series of activities for the students to perform. It applies Bloom's Taxonomy of learning objectives (Bloom, 1956).

It also employs therapeutic writing by producing reflective writing in response to the YA books chosen by the students (Bolton, 2011).

SESSION DIRECTIONS

The following is a guide for the students during each session.

Pre-sessional week: Reading the books!

This session takes place a week prior to the first interactive session. It is a reading week for the students.

- Choose a book
- Find your group
- Join a WhatsApp group together
- Play your assigned roles
- Read the book

SESSION 1: WRITING THE LETTER (3 HOURS)

Choose a character you relate to
Draw a 'role on the wall' description of the character
Free write your response
Write a letter to them
Inspire the letter structure from the book
Sign it with a pseudonym
Fold the letters and place them in the secret box
General feedback

SESSION 2: WORKSHOPPING THE LETTERS (3 HOURS)

- Now choose a blind letter
- Read it
- Write a feedback letter
- Fold both letters together
- Place them back in the secret box
- Locate your original letter and its feedback
- Read it aloud
- Briefly discuss your feedback with the class
- General feedback

ASSESSMENT

As it is noted in the workshop outline, this workshop should be assessed in two ways:

Peer-assessed feedback and Peer discussion

ACADEMIC COMMENTARY

'Dear YA,': Using therapeutic creative letter-writing in response to young adult fiction as a tool to improve Libyan ESL students' creativity and language skills

'How wonderful it is to be able to write someone a letter! To feel like conveying your thoughts to a person, to sit at your desk and pick up a pen, to put your thoughts into words like this is truly marvellous.' — Haruki Murakami (Murakami, 2000)

INTRODUCTION

For my Teaching Creative Writing assignment, I have submitted a creative writing workshop model designed for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, which promotes creative letter-writing as a form of therapy. The inspiration behind my workshop idea stems from my experience as an ESL teacher in Libya. Teaching creative writing to university students (aged 17-22) in Libya was always a challenge because I had to create flexible and effective writing spaces for my students in order to achieve an innovative and comfortable learning environment. One of the main reasons why young Libyan students struggle to perform creatively in the classroom is due to poor mental health and an excessive amount of war trauma. In fact, Libyan university students between the ages 17-24 face high levels of anxiety and depression due to war trauma (Salam et al., 2012). Another reason is that ESL university students are usually taught how to write academically in English (Second Language/L2) instead of looking at writing as a creative skill (Iida, 2013).

In the past few months, I began researching my interest in embedding creative letter-writing in my writing lectures as a form of therapy. Then I read Gillie Bolton's book, *Write Yourself: Creative Writing and Personal Development* (2011), and I became even more interested in activating a therapeutic letter-writing lesson for young Libyan students. In her book, Bolton highlights the 'private communication' we receive as writers when we write letters to ourselves and others. Consequently, this kind of privacy generates letter-writing as a form of therapy for the writer dealing with any type of trauma or illness (Bolton, 2011).

Moreover, my students mostly prefer reading young adult texts as they are more attracted to realistic stories about people in their age group. To define young adult fiction, YA is a genre specified for young readers between the ages of 12-18, and it focuses on significant events in teenagers' lives as they transform from childhood to adolescence (Chance, 2014). Young adults tend to enjoy reading YA fiction more than any other genre because of its simple style, realistic narratives and contemporary

writing (Chance, 2014). I have decided to include a YA reading stimulus to help them produce letters of their own account by choosing a character they relate to in the text and address a letter to them. YA books are critical texts and can enable students to start important conversations about difficult and sensitive subjects, such as mental illness and trauma. This pedagogical approach (2020) is encouraged by Jennifer Buehler's critical approach to teaching YA literature in an English classroom. This led me to develop my own pedagogy for a therapeutic creative writing workshop targeting ESL students as creative learners through devising YA texts and private letter-writing.

In this academic commentary, I will be discussing therapeutic creative letter-writing pedagogies for ESL teaching and explaining how I formed my own creative scheme of work and its pedagogy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

TEACHING CREATIVE WRITING TO ESL STUDENTS

For English as a Second Language teaching, creative writing plays an important role in fostering ESL students' creativity levels and cognitive skills. Even though creative writing in an ESL learning environment is not highly common for ESL teachers, creative writing as a skill is crucial for ESL students because of its positive influence. Writing creatively nurtures ESL students' written, critical and verbal language skills, including their reading comprehension, grammar and vocabulary skills (Smith, 2013). ESL creative writing might improve ESL students' self-expression, artistic voice and communication abilities as well as enhancing their relationship between reading and writing creatively (Gang, 2005).

THERAPEUTIC WRITING AND TRAUMA

The healing power of writing as an activity affects the well-being of the writer as well as their ability to better express their traumas openly. Therapeutic writing is usually known as 'Expressive writing', a term coined by the American social psychologist James W. Pennebaker in the 1980s. Pennebaker

(1997) argues that any kind of trauma can be healed through the act of 'Expressive writing'. Whether that is done as a form of a creative journal or diary, expressing the self through writing affects the overall well-being of the writer/patient, which gradually provides a consistent record of one's health status and self-expression (Pennebaker, 1997). Another form of therapeutic writing is reflective writing which deals with 'writing for the self' and introspective communication with the 'self'. Bolton views reflective writing as an effective therapeutic writing method for all kinds of experiences, such as mental illness, physical illness, emotional and traumatizing events. An example of therapeutic writing is letter-writing since it offers a sense of privacy with the 'inner-self' and allows the writer to start a dialogue with the 'inner-self' through crafting an intimate conversation between the writer and their 'inner-self' (Bolton, 2011).

CREATIVE LETTER-WRITING AS A MEANS OF THERAPY

Creative letter-writing is a therapeutic element of personal writing. It is considered as a form of 'narrative therapy' by many psychologists in mental health care settings (Jolly, 2010). The performance of creative letter-writing can also be applied in school counselling between students, teachers and school counsellors. It creates direct communication between students and school counsellors who wish to explore their students' mental health and well-being in a meaningful and practical way, and this type of letter-writing communication can be used as a future reference for school counselling trainees and therapists (Decino et al., 2018). Creative letter-writing serves as a powerful tool when it is used as a healing mechanism to overcome a difficult trauma, such as sexual abuse and violence. Thus, it helps sexual abuse survivors express their experiences in a safe and open way, allowing them to connect with other survivors and communicate better with their therapists (Kress et al., 2008).

THE BENEFITS OF CREATIVE LETTER-WRITING IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

Letters, in general, have been used in ESL teaching as one of the primary forms of written structures to construct ESL students' social understanding and written communication in English. Since creative writing as a skill is beneficial to ESL students, their sense of creativity might develop when they use letters to tell stories. Gradually, as storytellers, they will expand their writing skills by creating new worlds, building their vocabulary bank, gaining empathy and knowledge as well as forming better connections with their fellow students (Banegas, 2011). Letter-writing enables ESL students to become active students inside the classroom as they are allowed to voice their thoughts and recommendations to their teachers in a creative way (Hashim, 2015).

READING FOR CREATIVITY, REFLECTION AND EMPATHY

Books can function as mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors for young readers (Bishop, 1990). In other words, stories can be used as educational, informative and reflective tools for adolescents, who might not view reading books as an important element of their learning process. Essentially, young adult literature in the past few years began to evolve and offer realistic, critical and engaging texts in which serious subjects and issues are discussed in a way young people can understand and relate to (Dunn, 2014). Reading can increase students' creativity levels and polish their writing style. Through reading creatively and responding to texts reflectively, students become better readers and thinkers. The quality of their literacy in the English language improves as they read more books for pleasure and extensive learning. In brief, students become creative writers when they look at the texts they are reading through a creative lens (Grainger et al., 2005).

CREATING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Humans are learning beings who socially and culturally engage in all kinds of communities to achieve knowledge and prosperity. This is true when it comes to writers as learners. When writers

Creative Writing Gets Different

are working as a community, they are technically forming a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Maintaining a community of writers in a creative writing workshop maximizes the strengths of the students and minimizes their weaknesses on an individual level. As a group of people, they begin to learn collectively and socially by sharing their experiences and suggestions (Blythe and Sweet, 2008).

THE CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOP

From a pedagogical view, creative writing in educational settings has usually been taught in the form of a workshop, where students share their work with others and receive honest feedback. According to Rosalie Morales Kearns (2009), this type of workshop (the normative creative writing workshop) depends on peer-assessed feedback, which mostly focuses on the 'flaws' found in a writer's work rather than their progress as a writer. It is controlled by the 'gag rule', which forces the writer to stay silent during the whole period of receiving 'negative' feedback for their work. As a result, the 'normative creative writing workshop' discourages students and writers from producing their best potential due to the given authority to their fellow writers who enjoy 'tearing' their work apart. However, there is a solution to design a 'non-normative creative writing workshop' which aims to challenge the 'normative' by forming an engaging, reflective and comfortable environment for writers and their creative works. The alternatives suggested by Kearns (2009) are set to focus on:

- Studying 'published works' through close reading sessions
- Attempting a variety of writing exercises
- Promoting an open peer discussion as an alternative to the 'gag rule'.

WORKSHOP SUMMARY

As I mentioned in the introduction of this commentary, my creative writing workshop is going to be a series of therapeutic creative letter-writing sessions taught in a 'non-normative workshop' style. It is designed for ESL creative writing students. The predicted number of students is 16 students as they will have to be divided into four groups during the workshop. Since my ESL students' English language level ranges between intermediate and

advanced levels, YA fiction fits perfectly for them to read as an example of published texts due to its simplicity of vocabulary and modern writing style which is targeted towards young people between the ages of 12-18 (Chance, 2014). I will be recommending them a list of four YA books, and they will have to choose one book from the list. Each book will be studied by one group consisting of four roles: lead teacher, scribe, well-being co-ordinator and motivator. Following Kearns' creative writing workshop pedagogy (2009), my workshop is based on her three main workshop activities:

Activity	Plan
Reading published works	Students will read a YA book of their choice throughout the workshop.
Writing exercises	They will attempt a number of writing activities, as summarizing the YA book they have read, writing a response letter to a character of their own choice, using drama 'role-on-the-wall' (Coultras, 2006), etc.
Peer discussion	<p>This will be given anonymously in a safe and open manner so that students feel encouraged and positive about the work they have produced. It will be done through writing feedback letters, and it will take place after they write their response letters under pseudonyms, fold them and place them in an anonymous box.</p> <p>Individually, they must choose one letter, read it and construct a feedback letter and address it to the original owner of the creative letter. After that, students will have to fold both letters together and place them back in the mysterious box.</p> <p>Finally, students will locate their anonymous letters along with the feedback and read them to the class and discuss the feedback they have received in a comfortable and exciting atmosphere.</p>

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this workshop follow Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy (1956). It is summarised in this visual guide adapted from Vanderbilt University Centre for Teaching (Armstrong, 2010):

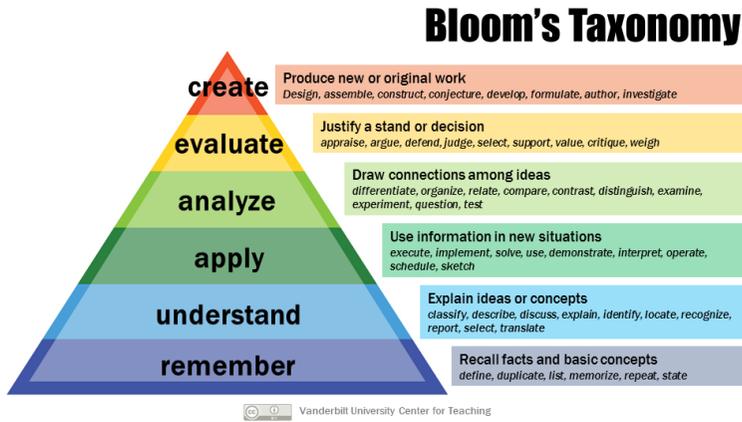


FIGURE 6: ADAPTED TAXONOMY

CHALLENGES

Even though this workshop is designed as a therapeutic and relaxing writing session, ESL students might face a series of challenges during the various stages of this workshop. This is true when it comes to teaching writing to ESL students (Randolph, 2012). These challenges are:

- Struggling to write in their second language
- Viewing the workshop as extremely boring or challenging
- The pressure of producing complex structure and polished language
- Being asked to respond creatively to a published text
- Struggling to understand complex vocabulary and grammar

To overcome these challenges as a teacher, I am going to be paying close attention to those who will face these challenges by assigning them a student tutor from their group to supervise their overall performance. It will enhance their reading experience and nurture their knowledge by participating in a reciprocal teaching and learning environment (Stricklin, 2011).

SELECTING THE YA BOOKS

I have selected four realistic YA books for this workshop according to Rosemary Chance's (2014) YA librarian guide, which describes its characteristics as:

- Told by a teenager
- Focus on a teenager's main life events
- Adults fade into the background
- Dark subjects, such as mental illness and abuse, are discussed
- Set in the modern world
- Writing is simple with long dialogues and short descriptions
- Celebrates the internet and use of technology by teenagers

Based on this list, I chose four YA books, two of which have been previously included as examples in my creative piece model, and these books are:

Radio Silence by Alice Oseman (2016)

All The Things We Never Said by Yasmin Rahman (2019)

Am I Normal Yet? By Holly Bourne (2015)

Eliza and Her Monsters by Francesca Zappia (2017)

In light of the current Covid-19 pandemic, this workshop is likely to take place online. This workshop will be managed online through the use of forums and WhatsApp for student groups engagement. It will mix both synchronous and asynchronous engagement with the students to achieve an effective linguistic and creative learning environment based on the students' circumstances and abilities (Mazlan et al.,2021).

APPLYING CREATIVE WRITING TOOLS

A variety of writing tools will be applied by the student to respond creatively to the YA texts and enjoy the therapeutic aspects of the workshop.

DRAMA: 'ROLE-ON-THE-WALL'

Students are expected to use visual and dramatic storytelling methods, such as the 'role-on-the-wall' drama technique, to reflect on the character they choose to respond to. They will have to draw the character's head and shoulders, writing down their inner feelings inside the figure, and everything else said to or heard by them from others is drawn outside of the figure (Coults, 2006).

FREEWITING AND REFLECTIVE WRITING AS A RESPONSE METHOD

As for the writing tool, students will be using, freewriting and reflective writing are the main writing techniques required to respond creatively to the YA texts. Freewriting developed by Peter Elbow (1998) is highly useful for ESL students' learning process in the creative writing classroom because it provides a safe and open space for them to share their thoughts and engage with the reading (Penn and Hyun-Woo, 2016). It also deepens their thinking skills, improves their confidence and lessens their fear of evaluation (Park, 2020). Reflective writing is later applied as a form of letter-writing. Students will reflect on their reading experiences, the YA text and thoughts freely and in their own privacy through creative-letter writing (Bolton, 2011).

CONCLUSION

This academic commentary reviewed the pedagogical design and background of teaching therapeutic creative letter-writing workshop to young ESL students by using YA fiction. It highlights the importance of including creative writing in the ESL classroom (Smith, 2013) as well as the practice of freewriting (Elbow, 1998) and reflective writing (Bolton, 2011). In addition, it describes the objectives and challenges of the workshop. It recommends the

'non-normative' workshop style to achieve an encouraging and comfortable space for ESL creative learners (Kearns, 2009). Finally, I would argue that this type of workshop is crucial in ESL educational settings as it offers multiple beneficial aspects of creative writing for ESL learners, such as the improvement of their critical and linguistic skills and their overall creativity levels.

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SALUTATIONS! WARREN PORTER

Welcome one and welcome all to the radical world of our Exploetry Sessions! I am excited to have you in our workshops as we dive into several different ways to promote expansive and explorative thinking in regards to our creation of poetry. In our three workshop sessions we will be looking at ways in which we can reinvent how we perceive the world that surrounds us. We will take mundane details of our everyday life and turn them into incredible assets designed to fuel the literary fires within our minds. We will be looking for the posters telling us who to call to clear out the gutters of our poetic restrictions. We will be turning faded stickers into statements, numbers into calls and trash into treasure. I do not wish to spoil any of the surprises we have in store, but I can tell you that it is time to let your poetry run wild. It is time to take risks, get spicy and plunge headfirst into your poems no matter your skill level or experience.

Our Exploetry Sessions are meant to be fun, inspiring and self-reflective. Enough chit chat, let's get rocking!

If you need to contact me with any questions, concerns or anything at all, you can reach me by phone or email. 23512 315135 radpoetry@gmail.com

SESSION 1, CUTTING UP MUNDANITY

WHAT IS CUT-UP POETRY?

“The fundamental premise of this method [cut-up] is the creation of new texts by cutting up at least two existing texts and recombining the fragments, at random. Hence the old texts are literally cut up and the end product is a new composite text.” (Robinson, 2011).

Typically cut-up will consist of the cutting up and rearranging of magazines, book pages and other typical household resources. However, being limited to the texts already established in the home can be pretty damn boring sometimes. Plus I am terrible with scissors, I would go to cut out “finger” and end up actually missing one. Don’t get me wrong though, cut-up in its traditional form can be rad. Take for instance the songs I am The Walrus by The Beatles and Moonage Daydream by David Bowie, the famous lyrics to these songs were inspired by writer William Burroughs and famously created through the cut-up method. However, for the goals of this class, we will be looking to put a bit more of a localized spice on the construction of our poems. We will be aiming to take the overlooked, daily world surrounding us with literary knives in hand and slash its flesh from bone to make the bland an art of new unknown. What we see in the wild is what will make the DNA of our poetry. We will be hunting for the hidden, the obvious, the torn and the forgotten, all of the words which crowd the eye of the city, and cut them up into a new meaning of what is to be a word in London.

THE CUTTING OF MUNDANITY

For our cut-up exercise, we will not be cutting up magazines, books, newspapers or anything of a strict literary sort. Instead, we will be using words we come across on a daily basis in the beast that is London. As we travel to and from work, school, stores and wherever else the long-winded roads take us, we are blasted with advertisements, graffiti, stickers, gig posters and other notifications of the like. Despite the abundance of words thrown in our direction, most of them often remain unnoticed or lack interaction. That is where we come in. Throughout our commutes we will be keeping track of the words we come across, jotting them down in our notebooks, phones or whatever is most convenient at that time. The purpose of using words found in the wild is to help promote a sense of poetic exploration in transforming that which may often be overlooked, into something entirely different and fresh to the creative mind. By doing so, this exercise can allow a person to create an interactive dialogue with the surrounding environment, thus hopefully opening up a new potential for poetic inspiration. Ideally, these poetic tools can

assist in reflecting and taking action upon one's local area to promote a further transformation of what could be considered mundane, into something powerful. It is with this form of praxis that we will strive to create art from our alternative resources.

CUT-UP EXPLORATION AND EXAMPLE

As I walked along Florence Road in New Cross while on my way to the corner shop, I took notice of various mediums upon which numerous insightful words were either printed, drawn or stuck. My brain juices started pumping at the thought of what might be created if I were to cut-up these resources. So I took further notice and in my phone, wrote down a few words from a recycling bin, an exterminator's van, a large road sign, several stickers and a few posters. The words collected are as follows,

“Green, waste, pests, kill, cross, the, left, a, fun, fair, stop, reign, dirty, discount, simply, Apri, vision, open,”. With these words collected primed for reapplication, I copied them each on individual scraps of paper and with closed eyes, put them in a random order to the create,

A Corner Shop In New Cross

Cross a green vision

Reign left open

Kill,

A cross fair the simply discount Stop.

Waste fun dirty April Pests.

TASKS

Your task to complete for our next poetry session, is a cut-up poem using words found around your environment. The poems need to be of no specific length or word count, but I would recommend finding at least four resources from which to cut your words so as to create a sizable pool to choose from. As poets, it is our job to embark on the exploration of our own minds within the context of our environments, and by extension our environments themselves. That is why we must be willing to look at our everyday world and question, record as well as reapply it into new forms of art and interpretation.

Now, despite the freedom with which poetry greets us, given the fact that we are still within the confines of a formal education setting, it may be best to stray from potentially triggering or distressing terms. With social tensions rather high at the moment for numerous reasons around the world, it may be best to proceed with caution. By all means if you wish to write a poem that may be treading the lines, then do so, I would be more than happy to provide feedback directly via email or office hours. However I would say have something ready for class as well. If you are unsure about any particular words, phrases, or anything at all in regards to the assignment, do feel free to email me.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Can cut-up poetry assist in times of writer's block?
Do you think of this as a productive way to create poetry?
What about cut-up poetry did you find most intriguing?

SESSION 2, CALLING POETRY

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CALLING POETRY?

For nearly every store, restaurant, drug dealer, barber shop, tattoo studio and taxi service there is a number to call for assistance. While poetry may not have a direct line through which to order a pizza or other substances, we can always make one up. Numbers have been used throughout poetry in numerous inventive ways. One of the most notorious uses of numbers is the Oulipian constraint and formula $N+7$ invented by Jean Lescure. $N+7$ is a method of poetry utilized when replacing every noun in a poem with the seventh word following it within the dictionary. While I may be bad at math and less fluent with a dictionary than I care to admit, we will still be using numbers but in a way that is different to Lescure. We will be creating poems disguised as phone numbers. Direct lines through which our poetic endeavours can be expressed and received only to those who know where to look and which codes to follow.

THE PLAN

To make these poems, we will firstly need a chart, our version of a dictionary to Lescure's N+7 if you like. This chart will give us the alphabet, as well as the numeric order of each individual letter.

A = 1	K = 11	U = 21
B = 2	L = 12	V = 22
C = 3	M = 13	W = 23
D = 4	N = 14	X = 24
E = 5	O = 15	Y = 25
F = 6	P = 16	Z = 26
G = 7	Q = 17	
H = 8	R = 18	
I = 9	S = 19	
J = 10	T = 20	

FIGURE I: NUMERIC CHART

It is important for us to keep track of these numbers as well as the letters they are associated with, for that is where the art of our poetry will come into play. We will be thinking of words and phrases that will fit into the character limitations of a phone number. This not only has an oulipian flavour to it, but ideally this exercise should hopefully change the way we see numbers and their arrangements. Instead of just seeing a sequence of numbers, perhaps we will be able to decipher or apply some extra goodies which might make those numbers a bit more interesting. By the end of our numerical experimentation hopefully we all will be able to see numbers through a different poetic lens, and perhaps start to think about how numbers and letters are both different and similar to one another.

CALLING POETRY, APPLICATION AND EXAMPLES,

Now that we have our handy chart, it is time for poetry to hear our sweet call. Firstly, I would recommend starting off with shorter words so that we may see how many letters over or

Inspiration and Diversity

under we may be if the ideal amount of numbers needed is not exactly met. Take for instance the word “Living” if we apply “Living” to the chart above we get L=12, I=9, V=22, I=9, N=14 and G=7. This sequence has nine numbers corresponding with their assigned letters making the word two numbers short of a typical eleven digit phone number. This may seem like an issue, but we have the secret gift of the almighty and mysterious zero. A zero may be used to fill gaps where words and numbers come up short. I recommend using them either at the beginning or the end of your sequence so that the words themselves stay intact. Unless you are choosing to get extra zesty by using a zero to separate two words within the same number, for example, 10251 209147 would translate to “A beating” with a zero separating the one of the “A” and the two of the “B”.

With these measures put into place, let’s get dialling.
For further information, please see our following help lines listed below.

10251 209147
85118 204954
09140 152118
01290 229147
16155 201825
01612 511950
08512 162119

If we were to refer each number to its assigned position in the alphabet using the chart we have above, the poem would be as follows

For further information, please see our following help lines listed below.

A beating
Heart died
In our
Living
Poetry
Please
Help us

TASKS

Your task for our poetry session is to devise your own phone number-based poem. This task can be quite tricky to keep track of, so I would recommend having the chart pulled up either on your computer or your phone as you are writing your poems. I would also recommend firstly drafting the poems on paper, that way you are able to draw lines between each letter and set the appropriate numbers out individually so as to make counting them easier. Your poems do not have to be a specific length, so long as you are able to demonstrate the theory behind this method. As always, please email me if you have any questions.

Questions To Consider

How else could you use the alphabet chart to create number based poems?

Would you consider using this in your poetry going forward?

What do you find most challenging about this task?

SESSION 3, POETRY IN THE GUTTER

GET YOUR MIND INTO THE GUTTER (BUT NOT IN A WEIRD WAY)

'We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.'
(Wilde, O, 1893, *Lady Windermere's Fan*).

In this session we will not be gazing into the velvet night curtains draped with ancient stars above which glisten through the darkness of our eye. We will be doing the opposite of what Lord Darlington suggests in the third act of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, and that is looking directly into the gutter. We will be searching not for the stars, but for the dog shit, the broken glass, the used condoms and fast food packaging. Everything we see in the gutter will be ours to use for poetic inspiration as we create poetry from the ugly, the thrown away, the nasty, the gutter. Our aim in this session is to embrace that which is seen as dirty, disgraced and disposed of in order to write a poem either about the objects themselves, or perhaps where they came from or what will

become of them. We will strive to create a dialogue that stretches between our poetry and the objects we see within the gutter. We must be open to the beauty of waste.

INTO THE GUTTER

In a similar fashion to our previous session about the cutting up of mundanity, we will be using the local outdoor environment as our point of reference and as the wishing well of our inspiration. However instead of looking for specific words with which to construct our poems, we will be searching for the various items discarded into the ass crack of the streets. One of our aims in this session is to begin a working artistic relationship with an aspect of city living which is often intentionally, stepped over, walked around, kicked to the side and avoided altogether. By not only acknowledging the existence of our findings, but embracing and writing from them we will hopefully exercise a focused eye when it comes to what can be considered the starting point of art. While writing these poems do not be afraid to get a bit wild with them, if you find something particularly juicy feel free to explore what that juice is. Also, do not feel obligated to write something grotesque or grimy for the sake of doing so. Write whatever poetry comes to mind when looking at the objects found. This exercise is meant to unchain the inner poetic eye from any preconceived notions about what poetry is or is not. Which is precisely why we are starting this exercise from the gutter.

THE TREASURE

For this task I walked from New Cross to Greenwich in search of some street treasure. Along my journey I managed to find a crushed tube of facial cream, bones of some sort, a leaflet covered in bible verses, beer cans, and some feathers. I kept a running tab in my phone of the items I was able to find while along my walk. Which is what I would suggest to you as well, that way none of the discarded gems will become forgotten once more. After collecting the list of inspirations I would recommend thinking of different ways in which to approach the voices of your findings. You could for example sew them together into a single

Creative Writing Gets Different

narrative, chop each item into their own separate stanzas, or just put your ideas on X-Games mode and free style your way into a poem. Some other ideas may be to think of where these objects came from, why they ended up in the gutter, or perhaps where they will go in future. The direction of your poem is ultimately and always yours.

*A Night between Pavement There is no eternity in seeing or being seen,
Only in the drunken hope of being
Loved in breaths between
The time it takes to speak the word of god,
Can we forgive ourselves for what is flawed.
For if there were some endless miles grown
Between the parting of two married feathers, There would wait the pall
their years had sewn
Within the hidden storms their secret weathers.
Yet as we stare beneath the surface of
Our wrinkled skin,
Into the passages etched from what we could've
Judged as sin
We see that guilt, like rose of coloured glasses Blinds its host of life,
waving as it passes.
But as St. Paul laments his hours chime
In dignity which lacks a pause or stutter,
Man has held the ticking hands of time
And so becomes a carcass in the gutter.*

TASKS

For this session we will be looking to explore the wonders of what can be found in the gutter. In hopes to promote the essence of poetic exploration and expansion I would say aim to make your poems at least 10 lines long. However if you so desire, by all means dig deep and write longer pieces. So long as they are not novels, of course. I would really like you all to capitalize on the potential inventiveness and creativity that can be found when compiling such a variety of poetic stimuli. Your poems do not have to be in any specific form, genre or style, really let your mind run free with this one and see where the gutter takes you. Go with the flow as some might say. Have fun!

Questions To Consider

Could this prompt be applied to other forms of writing? If so, what would you try it with?

Did you feel this task to be limiting or liberating?

What is the most intriguing object you found and why did it catch your eye?

THANK YOU!

I wish to give my thanks to each and every one of you who embarked upon this poetic quest for word based freedom and exploration with me through our Exploetry Sessions! I have absolutely loved getting to know all of you and your poetry. I am incredibly excited to see what the future holds for you all. I hope that going forward you are able to take some of what we have explored in our workshops along for the rest of your poetry rides. It has been nothing short of a pleasure working with you! Stay safe and keep in touch!

CRITICAL COMMENTARY

While constructing the ideas for my Exploetry Sessions, a key aim of mine was to make it fun, not only for the imagined students, but for myself as well. This longing for enjoyment is what led to several crucial characteristics of the lesson plans and their themes. The overall arching theme of utilizing the surrounding city environment stemmed from the notion of turning something familiar into something unfamiliar. I aimed for my students to be able to find art in places they may have overlooked or had not yet thought to seek, by doing so I hoped it may have the potential to start a more in depth dialogue based relationship between the art of the students and their locations. Ideally this dialogue would then allow the students to feel more comfortable when addressing and approaching poetry. While imagining the students involved in these sessions, I thought of them to be between the ages of 16 and 19. I felt as though the language of my natural demeanor would be able to communicate and connect with this age group better than others because it is closer to my own. With this age group in mind I had envisioned that the Exploetry Sessions would be an extra-curricular poetry workshop set

Creative Writing Gets Different

outside of typical school or university hours. In this setting I would hope the pressure of performing for grades would be minimized, and the act of writing poetry itself would be the main focus. With these details put into place, it was time to craft the lessons themselves.

I started the first of three sessions with *Cutting Up Mundanity*, for cut-up poetry does not heavily rely on prior poetic ability or experience. By analyzing not only the words the students chose to use, but the arrangements in which they fell and their reactions to them, I believed I would be able to gain a better insight to their styles, preferences and integrity. I also thought this approach might resonate with students of this time because cut-up poetry was first devised within an artistic movement which

‘represents an aesthetic of action grounded in conflicting anarchist sentiments extending from idealism to nihilism. It exhibits a nonconformist human spirit with respect to societal and artistic conventions and traditions’ (Cater, 1998).

called Dada. The anarchist and rule breaking nature of Dada was born as a reactionary movement to spite the First World War, along with a society these artists deemed to be doomed by the war or, victim to the mundanity of their current artistic canon.

‘The Dadaists sought to liberate art from established assumptions and practices intended to represent the world through rational means (such as the laws of geometric perspective) or in accordance with the formalist notion of art for art’s sake.’ (Carter, 1998).

This disruption in conventional art sparked many inventive and controversial methods of creating art including,

‘The fundamental premise of this method [cut-up] is the creation of new texts by cutting up at least two existing texts and recombining the fragments, at random. Hence the old texts are literally cut up and the end product is a new composite text.’ (Robinson, 2011).

Inspiration and Diversity

With the historically significant years through which we have lived in recent times, it seems only fitting to implement forms of expression designed to withstand the weight of worldly chaos.

Following the era which holds no rules named Dada, I thought it might be interesting to compose a lesson which was based in the constraint centered Oulipian movement. For

“The purpose of the OuLiPo is to rediscover old forms that are unfamiliar (or that can be exploited in unfamiliar ways) and to invent new ones. It thus aims, on the one hand, at providing writers with appropriately new ways of saying whatever they have to say; and, on the other, at providing analytical and manipulative forms that apply to pre-existing texts. can reveal unsuspected attributes as latent in them.”
(Mathews, 1976).

By having the students already re-familiarise themselves with their surroundings in order to gain the inspiration for their poems, the Oulipian approach further helps to promote the essence of the reinvention of the phone number. Taking the numeric inspiration of the formula $N+7$ invented by Jean Lescure, I aimed to devise a lesson that helped to change the way my students would see numbers. I hoped that after utilizing the alphabetical chart, they may be more inclined to see a phone number and try to decipher letters from it or imagine a way to rearrange the numbers to fit a specific letter sequence. Numbers after all are symbols meant to represent something greater than its appearance, much like poetry. On the surface numbers and poetry seem to be worlds apart, especially in a mathematical context, but in the second session *Calling Poetry* I hoped to narrow that gap. The Oulipian movement consisted of numerous mathematicians and scientists such as Raymond Queneau, François Le Lionnais and Claude Berge. These men were able to take what was familiar to them which was math, science and poetry and deconstruct all three in order to rebuild an art which was new and foreign. This ideology of intentionally disrupting the known to create an unknown was the basis upon which the

Creative Writing Gets Different

second session was based. I was hoping that by introducing this concept, we would then find more liberty in the act of determining what is and what is not considered poetry in the mind of the student and how those conclusions are made.

As we approached the third and final lesson, Poetry In The Gutter, I wanted to let the students have complete freedom of form and style. From starting with little restrictions in the cut-up exercise, to the immense constraints of the phone numbers, I wanted the final lesson to be a happy medium. The students were free to write whatever flavor of poetry they so desired. The only guidelines being that the inspiration needed to come from what was found in the gutters. The usage of the gutter was intended to be seen as a continuation of the overarching theme of bringing new meaning to the overlooked sights of everyday life. With the abundance of trash being an aspect of city living that most strive to avoid, this aversion to that which is seen as dirty inadvertently creates a space for potential reassessment and understanding. By essentially writing poems out of our own waste, our,

‘Garbage poems often emphasize the presence of life (flies and scavenger birds, for example) in the waste place, while also depicting the dump as a place of transformation, both physical and, metaphorically spiritual.’ (Todd, 2014).

In the act of growing art from trash, the students are made to think of ways in which the ideas of beauty and ugliness are both similar and different. The students are faced with an opportunity to reimagine the relationship between trash and art. For in a sense,

“Ultimately, categories of trash and treasure represent a false dichotomy. Things we treasure change value over time, taking on new meanings or losing their meaning to us as we grow older and the circumstances of our lives evolve. Trash, the accumulation of things we discard, has its own beauty, its own emotional resonance that emerges because it represents our lives.” (Todd, 2014)

This shifting of perspective has been a goal of these sessions from start to finish. By bringing together the different worlds of art and the everyday sights to which we are mostly blind, we then shed new light on what has the potential to become something far beyond its initial intentions. This is an element of the sessions that I hope my students could recognize and apply to their own writing and creative practices. I hope that by seeing what something as simple as a sticker or beer can is capable of becoming, they in turn strive to be the best versions of themselves as they could be.

I chose the structure of these lesson plans to be loosely based on the Tyler Rationale which,

‘translates into a linear model that begins with objectives and then proceeds to the selection of learning experiences based on these. The next step is to organize learning experiences for maximum effectiveness, and the last is to evaluate the curriculum.’ (Fogarty, 1976.).

With this structure put into place, I believed it would make the overall assessment of student progress easier to obtain and observe throughout the duration of the sessions. This structure also allows me to have several reference points should I ever become distracted or disoriented in the teaching of my sessions. It is often easy to deviate from this structure, which is why I have only based my lessons loosely upon it. The method of organization provided a nice balance of rigidity and flexibility in the execution of the lessons. This formulaic structure also permits and in some ways promotes the “The BSCS 5E Instructional Model which consists of following phases: engagement, exploration, explanation, elaboration, and evaluation”(Bybee et al., 2006). This model depicts the essence of what I tried to accomplish through the sessions. In order to engage with my students I used a language that seemed more casual, natural and relatable to the age group and allowed space for the same to be returned. According to Lynn D. Zimmerman,

'One strategy for tackling the relatability conundrum involves reframing the dynamic between texts and students' (Zimmerman, 2021). Hopefully by altering the language from a professional demeanour to a more relaxed version of itself it would then make the students feel more comfortable in the exploration of their own voices. Finding your own voice "is to find your own style, your own subjects, your own rhythm, so that every element in your nature can contribute to the work of making a writer of you" (Brandel, 139). Stemming from the explorative nature of the lessons, I then would explain the process of our assignments and provide an example of my own writing. By using the same methods I assigned to them and demonstrating how they could work I not only tried to guide the students in the right direction, but I also tried to show a sense of vulnerability. Workshops can be scary, but by leading the charge, I hoped the students would be able to feel as though they were in a safe space in which to elaborate upon their ideas and expand the vocal boundaries of their poetry. 'Voice becomes linked to the discovery of a pre-linguistic self and its expression in a unique writing style.'

(Dawson, 2003). When the lessons were to finish I would then be able to step back and evaluate the process as a whole and assess what worked and what did not. This process of the final of the five E's resembles to me the method of action research. This form of research could not only apply to the evaluation and assessment of the students, but my own teaching as well. By planning the sessions and asking key questions then applying the actions needed to collect the data from both the students and myself, I am able to observe, analyse and report my findings. Following this I am then free to reflect upon the process as a whole to determine what worked and what did not. I am able to see what sessions resonated with the students and which ones did not. I am able to see what granted the best results, and what did not. I am able to look retrospectively at my teaching as well as the impact of it and then redraft my sessions as well as my own approach to teaching, in order to devise the best lessons I can.

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PROPOSING POETRY WORKSHOPS FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS: ZAHRA JALEEL

POETRY AS A MEANS OF EXPLORING,
HEALING, AND NARRATIVES

INTRODUCTION

While the past year and current pandemic revealed cracks in our systems and collective psyche, it has also highlighted the importance of our key workers, namely, the doctors. While some of us had the privilege to stay at home, pick up a semblance of our lives and piece together a new normal, doctors and medical staff, including my father, were needed more than ever. Newly graduated doctors were called on for rounds in Covid wards, while student nurses were roped in earlier than expected to keep up with the hospital admissions.

All this raised an important question: Who takes care of our carers? What support is available to them during and beyond this pandemic? If mental health issues and suicide rates were already rife (Agerbo et. al, 2007) among doctors to begin with, I fear to picture a future where the mental health services are not radically re-organised and equipped to better support them in light of this pandemic.

In this essay, I would like to propose a series of poetry writing workshops for medical students, as part of a multi-disciplinary education that promotes holistic learning and better mental health outcomes. For the purpose of these session plans, I aim to

look at the power of exploratory writing, narrative medicine and poetry as means of healing. These sessions build on the vision of medical humanities programmes in UK universities as well as organisations that host creative writing workshops for healthcare workers and promote a creative practice.

BACKGROUND

After completing my schooling in Saudi Arabia, I moved to India to pursue higher education. I enrolled in entrance coaching institutions that prepared high school graduates to pass the annual entrance exam that guaranteed entry into the top medical schools in the country. These residential programmes required us to continue studying with a singular focus for the next 12-14 months with minimal contact with family members and friends outside of the hostel. There was poor understanding of mental health issues and no support offered in these courses.

Suicide rates at these institutions were high and often covered up to attract a record number of medical aspirants every year and save face. Suffice to say, my mental health significantly deteriorated and I failed to make the cut off despite multiple attempts.

I decided to pursue Biomedical Sciences at a Russell Group university of choice and seek help for my mental health issues. It was during my degree that I got to explore my interests in writing, speaking and debating. I enrolled in student societies, took part in National Poetry Slams (Uni-Slam, the Roundhouse Poetry Slam, Asia House Poetry Slam) and attended writing workshops while managing my studies. The exposure to creative communities and poetry workshops significantly improved my writing, granted me a community of writers and helped regain my confidence. The precise nature of language and the condensed emotions that poetry holds, helped unlock my writing which prose and long form fiction previously had not.

Despite some support from the university, I barely managed to scrape through my final assessments and dissertation during the start of this pandemic. The current situation for medical

Creative Writing Gets Different

practitioners and research staff looked dire and I could no longer pretend to keep up with the demands of my degree and the career path it preceded. I decided to take a leap and pursue a creative writing degree and continue attending workshops and writing poetry.

AIMS

The desire to teach poetry to communities of medical students and staff is a deeply personal one. I grew up with the hopes of pursuing a career in medicine like my father, my uncles and cousins who had similar dispositions and outlooks in life. What I was not prepared for was the tenacity and resilience it took to prepare for the exams, commit five years to medical school and cope with the emotional distress on the job while reckoning with one's own and other's mortality (Ventriglio et al, 2020) on a daily basis.

With these poetry workshops, I hope to facilitate safe spaces geared towards listening and empathy with minimal demand in terms of turning in work or expectations on work produced. I intend to prioritise exploratory writing or free-writing, different methods of narrative in poetry, using non-literary forms as inspiration to tell their stories.

I am interested in planning workshops with an intersectional approach as guided by the thinking of *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop: How To Decolonise the Creative Classroom* (Chavez, 2020) and *Craft in the Real World* (Salesses, 2020). The approach encapsulates decolonised reading lists, creating own canon that is more reflective of the communities we live in, rethinking MFA workshop vestiges such as the gag rule and working with more contemporary forms and practices. Whilst these workshops are not meant to be utilitarian in nature or promise to provide a civilising veneer for the participants, I acknowledge the power and impact of narrative in medicine and how engaging with the literature and writing their own poems helps embrace their whole humanity and equip them better for the complexity of patient-doctor interactions.

Ultimately, I do not think promoting creative practices in medical education is an entirely separate or new endeavour. The use of literature in medical education has been written about extensively by Joanne Trautmann and Robert Coles in the US. Their arguments for the aesthetic and ethical purposes of such a learning is compelling and is now seen in the establishment of medical humanities programmes such as narrative medicine, philosophy and such.

THE POWER OF POETRY

The nature of inquiry, sense-making and searching for patterns signals a deep-rooted observation that is crucial for both disciplines. Often, spending time in the lab peering down the microscope whilst trying to distinguish the features of a cell stain felt not much different from the mental efforts spent poring over a poem, trying to find the right words to convey an emotion. The works of poet-physicians such as John Keats, William Carlos Williams, Fady Joudah, Nuar Alsaïdir, Seema Yasmin, and Amit Majmudar show an incisive attention to language and its intricacies and the larger worlds around them.

Last year, an old classmate posted a picture of a poetry pamphlet handed out to medical students of her class at Keele University. It was no surprise considering the renewed attention towards poetry with increasing sales and the recognition of its benefits in these times of increased loneliness. Endeavours such as the Global Vaccine Project and A Drop of Hope invited poets to write poems of the current times, in light of the vaccine rollout. The elusive nature of poetry, its evasion of linear and logical meaning making, the play with language, facilitates an ability to communicate the strangeness and dystopian nature of this pandemic.

What I found particularly refreshing in my introduction to poetry was the lack of expectations for a linear narrative, more freedom with grammatical rules and the use of white space to convey meaning as much as the words. In *On Poetry* (Maxwell, 2013), he writes of the integral use of white space - of the silence as one-

Creative Writing Gets Different

half of a poem. He further compares this silence to the music in a song, how it works with the lyrics to convey meaning. These strayed from the narratives I encountered during class, which was integral to memorising the hard facts of the human body. I enjoyed the freedom in playing with language as others have before me and hope to offer a glimpse of the same through these workshops.

EXPLORATORY WRITING

In *Poetry, Therapy and Emotional Life* (Hedges, 2005) the author raises the similarities between poetry and therapy.

'A poem can start with an image like a rock, a tulip, a railway station or a shoebox, and from that image layers of meaning emerge. Similarly, a client may start: 'I don't know why I feel so down today. I dropped my son off at school, nothing was different, it's just that he didn't turn back and wave as he usually does.' From that tiny detail may come a sensation of not being needed as a parent in the same way, linked to a powerful memory of not being wanted, to an overwhelming feeling of isolation.' (Hedges, 2005)

In *The Hatred of Poetry* (Lerner, 2017) the poet writes of the impossible task of writing a poem. The central idea being that it is impossible to translate a feeling into words and so we are doomed from the very start. The poet and playwright Caroline Bird, embraces this paradox wonderfully in her essay *The Discipline of Getting Lost: On the Impossibility of Poems* (Bird, 2019).

'It's like trying to converse with the ocean using only your eyebrows, post a letter into a stranger's forehead, clean a skyscraper with your tongue. Each poem is an attempt to communicate something wordless.... using words.' (Bird, 2019)

Further in the essay, she encourages the reader to write without the knowledge of what comes next. This is best captured by Gillie Bolton in her book *Reflective Practice: Writing and Professional Development* (Bolton, 2014). In chapter 8, *Reflective Practice*, she describes writing uncensored, without stopping, allowing flow of thought, giving self-permission to write whatever comes to mind. In writing workshops, this kind of writing is usually termed a free-write and usually serves as warm up before the main writing exercises. In my own practice, I have found free-writes and what I write in response to those prompts more crucial than any planned out writing. The deceptively simple nature of it is truly hard to practice. As an adult who has been conditioned to think in certain ways, ascertain right from wrong and taught the right ways to speak, implicitly or explicitly, this is difficult.

In *The Artist's Way* (Cameron, 2016), Julie, a creative practitioner and mentor herself, provides a twelve-week, instructional course that is meant to free the inner critic, help the reader dredge up their more imaginative and freer selves by means of free-writing (Morning Pages) and taking themselves out on Artists Dates on a daily and weekly basis. In these workshops, I aim to offer free-writing as often as possible, especially during the start of the session as a means of flexing their writer muscles and getting into the mode of thinking that poetry embraces.

This is further facilitated with the help of newspaper clippings, other poems, images of their choosing, lists written by other participants to be passed around. These are meant to act as guides that will further help them explore their own stories, interests and thoughts in writing.

NARRATIVE IN POETRY AND MEDICINE

One of the primary tenets of Narrative Medicine, a field that has evolved from predecessors with different names such as Literature in Medical Education, Literature and Medicine, is close reading. Even though it claims to have left behind literature and medicine and presented itself a distinct field, the study of it relies on thorough understanding and engagement with both literature

and medicine (Jones, 2013). Close reading and analysis of the texts and poems in class is another of the methods that is crucial to the writing of poems. Through a distinct close-reading guided by Stephen Fry's commandments in *The Ode Less Travelled* (Fry, 2007), participants are encouraged to examine the narratives in the poems themselves, whilst also alerting them to the narratives in medicine and the larger worlds they engage with. The poems chosen and mentioned in the session plans are mostly by contemporary poets, all written and read in English, that speak and dissect their various backgrounds.

In *Staying Alive* (Astley, 2002), Neil Astley, poet and editor of Bloodaxe Books, speaks of how poets writing currently are different from poets of the past, no longer sitting in ivory towers—they come from all kinds of backgrounds and their poems reflect the diversity of this experience. The benefits of close reading and engagement with narratives further empowers them to embrace the complexity of their interactions and could possibly better equip them to empathise and understand patients from backgrounds different from their own. Prize winner T.S Eliot and Roger Robinson termed poems as 'empathy machines' in a recent interview in *The Guardian*. Embracing this notion, I believe that the poems provided and the poems they write can act as bridges of connection to experiences other than their own and help them make sense of it. Although poems do not always have a linear narrative or a typical story arc, it will be useful to engage with free-association and non-linear narratives and aim to write some poems that do the same.

USING NON-LITERARY FORMS AS INSPIRATION

Whilst the poetry exercises listed here can be used for any groups of writers, they are written keeping in mind the non-literary texts and worlds the participants have access to.

During my undergraduate degree, we spent a lot of our time poring over images and memorising diagrams, photos of cell stains, clinical presentations of diseases and cell cultures in labs. I would like to embrace the multiplicity of both disciplines and

encourage ekphrastic writing, borrowing forms from their own practices such as multiple-choice tests, lab reports and encouraging their metalinguistic abilities (Dymoke, 2013).

These exercises aim to work as mere starting points and ways of seeing the poetic possibilities of the texts they encounter and work with; also undoing the notions of poetry and writing as a separate discipline.

INTERSECTIONAL APPROACHES

Over the past five years, both as student and facilitator of writing workshops, I am deeply interested in the inherited methods of teaching and the ways they incite different responses. Most workshops I have attended tend to follow patterns invoked in MFA writing workshops. These include working with a set canon of writers, gatekeeping practices, asking the author to be silent during the feedback on their work, (gag rule) and creating an atmosphere that places the facilitator as expert and the participant as one who is there merely to passively learn.

In Chavez and Salesses' work, they question and take apart each segment of the writing workshop. I am interested in an intentional and intersectional practice that does not replicate practices that do not benefit us, especially people from marginalised backgrounds, and sometimes works instead to perpetuate the harms and silencing that take place outside of the classrooms.

What this looks like in practice is presenting oneself merely by name and prioritising getting to know each other in the space, as opposed to ascertaining oneself as the authority and mentioning one's qualifications at the start. Additionally, this means merely facilitating the workshop and not participating in the writing exercises themselves as the participants' writing is the priority here. I also hope to divest from the teaching practices they regularly encounter - lecturer, authoritative or coaching style teaching that is integral to imparting knowledge in a unidirectional way. This also includes making times for questions after most exercises, listening to the participants, and providing them space

Creative Writing Gets Different

where they are not just passive learners or listener in the doctor-patient interaction. These are crucial to encouraging autonomy of their narratives and affirming their voices.

Additionally, this means providing feedback by asking them questions, positing them as the authority of their own work and vision and acknowledging the fallibility of everyone in the room, as they may or may not share the same experience and hence can only provide suggestions rather than decisively tell how to write and what to write.

WORKSHOP PLANS

Ideal number of participants: 10-12

Running time: 1.5 hours, weekly

Venue: Classrooms / lecture halls/seminar rooms.

WORKSHOP 1

Starter

Free write: What brings you here? (2 minutes)

Ask them to write about the mental, physical, emotional journeys they have undertaken on their way to the physical space for your session.

This was an exercise I had encountered early on during the Barbican Young Poet sessions. I find that this simple question helps off-load whatever anxieties, doubts, and feelings participants bring in. It helps ground them by getting their thoughts on the paper. It also helps with the transition from their mental state to their present settings.

Additionally, starting off with a writing exercise, albeit a non-demanding one as a quick free write, helps set the tone of these sessions. Writing, and whatever exercise conducive to their writing practice will be the priority here.

Main activities

Introduce Stephen Fry's rules to reading a poem. (3 minutes)

Read as slowly as you can.

Read without worrying about understanding the poem - the poem is not a puzzle to solve.

Read out loud.

Explain his thinking behind these rules. The word 'rules' feels counter intuitive to the freeing, guiding principles set out by him. It is useful to have these constraints set out at the beginning and encouraged throughout the sessions.

Read: *Wild Geese* – Mary Oliver (10-15 minutes)

Questions: How does this poem make you feel?

What do you like in it?

What stands out to you?

What do you not understand?

These questions are adopted from a talk by Toni Giselle Stuart at the Decolonising Creative Writing conference earlier this year. These questions, especially the one asking participants what they do not understand helps get them into thinking deeply about these poems. It encourages the notion that you do not have to fully understand a poem and that it is okay to not 'get' things at first encounter.

Question: What makes this a poem?

This is to get participants to start unpacking their notions of what makes a poem, how it applies to this. This is by no means an exercise to evaluate the qualifications of this poem, but rather challenge the participants' idea of a poem. Answers might include images, musicality, the precision of language or free association. Participants may or may not agree that this is a poem.

Read: *Wild Geese* by Mary Oliver – Hera Lindsay Bird (5 minutes)

Ask participants to write down their thoughts about this poem. Repeat the set of guiding questions - encourage them to write

Creative Writing Gets Different

whatever comes to mind although the questions are there to help.

Read: *Wild Geese* – Amina Jama (5 minutes)

Questions: Did participants connect with any of the poems in particular?

What did they think of the last two poems and how it subverts or moves away from the first?

Hopefully, the introduction of these three poems, two of which are inspired by and in conversation with the first poem, plants the notion of poems as living, breathing creations. Most people's encounter with poetry at school are rarely encouraging or inclusive of their experience. Participants may find a connection in one of these three poems, written by poets with different voices, from different backgrounds.

After a short break, hand them printouts of poems. The selection of poems will be as random as possible from select anthologies and collections at hand.

Individual reading: Ask participants to pick one poem and read through it. (3-5 minutes)

Write: Ask them to respond to the poem. They do not have to write a poem in response. It can be a letter, a list, a free write. (5 minutes)

Reflect: Ask them to read through what they wrote. Underline three lines in their own response that they liked, were surprised by or stood out in their reading. (3-5 minutes)

Share: Ask participants to share bits/ all of their writing alongside the poem they responded to. (20-25 minutes)

This should get them to start articulating their responses, reactions and feelings about the poems. Make space for the range

Inspiration and Diversity

of responses - ask further questions, encourage and make sure not to voice your own responses to poems.

Bonus reading: *Answering Back: Living Poets Reply to the Poetry of the Past* (Edited by Carol Ann Duffy)

This anthology includes poems by established names printed alongside responses and inspired poems by contemporary poets. It is one of the first anthologies I came across that excited me as to the possibilities and conversations within poetry. It was also interesting to see poems that weren't necessarily praising or echoing the sentiments of the original poems - sometimes subverting it or writing a different perspective. This helped unmake any evaluation of poetry as a fixed art form.

WORKSHOP 2

Starter

Free write: Write responses to words supplied every 1.5 minutes. These words can be incorporated into the writing or not. Words will be read out loud to the participants.

Example: Foxgloves, mug, rock, spatula, waves. (7 minutes)

Note: Write a list of abstractions. (10 minutes)

Example: Love, anger, surprise, worry. (7 minutes)

Ask participants to close their eyes and picture what each word looks like to them. Ask them to really picture it for a minute and write it down. This can be alternated with any of the other senses i.e., touch, sound, smell.

Example: What does love look like? what does anger taste like? 'Love looks like my mother's furrowed brows as she chops onions for my favourite curry. Anger is my clenched fist after another person steps on my sneakers on the tube.'

Creative Writing Gets Different

After having done this for each word in turn, ask them to share any one of the lot. Most likely, none of the answers would be the same.

The purpose of this short exercise is to remind them of the power of specificity. It is easy to reach for abstractions in poetry when really, you're picturing something more specific and personal to you. What you think of when you hear love is quite different from what the person sitting next to you might think of. When you find the right image that captures the intensity and contours of that feeling, the more vivid and memorable it becomes to the reader.

Main activities

Read: *Sometimes your sadness is a yacht* (Underwood, 2015) (10 minutes)

Discuss: What do they think of this poem?

What makes it work?

Do the images convey the extent of the narrator's sadness?

Short introduction if necessary to similes and metaphors, (Hirsch, 2017) here, the difference between them and how it is used effectively in this poem.

Write: A list of abstract nouns and a list of concrete nouns. Five each. (10 minutes)

Ask the participants to pass one of the lists to the person sitting next to them. Do this until everyone has at least one list written by someone else.

For the next part of the exercise, match some of the concrete nouns to the abstract nouns in the list. It might look like this.

heart – boots. anger – red bucket. desire – empty perfume bottle.

Write: Pick one of the pairs and write a poem exploring how the abstract noun is like/ is the concrete noun. (8 minutes)

Inspiration and Diversity

Share: Ask the participants to share a few lines, reflections on the exercise and what they learned from it. Ask why they chose to employ a simile or a metaphor in their poem and if it achieved the intended effect. (3-5 minutes)

WORKSHOP 3

Main activities

Read: *Homage to my hips* (Clifton, 1987)

Ode to Dalya's Bald Spot (Nafis, 2019)

The House (Shire, 2014)

Discuss: Ask participants to share what stood out to them in each of these poems, how they celebrate the body, how they use simile or metaphor to achieve the intended effect. (15 minutes)

Short introduction to *Odes* (Hass, 2017), the origin of the form, where it is used and how all three poems here are odes even if not mentioned in the title.

Activity: Ask participants to pick one part of the body and draw it on the page. This can be as realistic or as imaginative as they like. Once they have finished sketching, ask them to write alternate names, purposes or realities of said part. (10 minutes)

Write: An ode to the chosen part of the body, incorporating the things they noted earlier. (10 minutes)

WORKSHOP 4

Starter

Activity: Ask participants to find a quote, a fact or common phrase. (2 minutes)

Free write: Using the chosen line as starting point, write about your emotional state without naming the feeling. (3 minutes)

Main activities

Activity: Ask participants to choose an image on their phones or available online for the next activity. A picture that has stood out to them, taken by them or someone else. (3 minutes)

Creative Writing Gets Different

Share: Go around the room delving into why they chose the image, what they remember about it, what is happening in the image. (5 minutes)

Questions: What happened before the picture was taken?
What is happening in the picture?
What happened after?

Ask participants to write responses to these questions with respect to the chosen image. The answers can be real or made-up. Be as detailed and specific as possible. For instance – *I was walking back from the British Museum with my cousin. It was quite sunny outside and we were about to head into the bubble tea place before we spotted this bookshop. We walked right ahead till we reached the storefront, when I asked my cousin to pose, and clicked this picture. I was wearing a yellow dress and my almost-white sneakers.* (6 minutes)

Read: *Triptych* (Nguyen, 2018)

Discuss: How does the poet use the photograph as inspiration for the poem?

How is the photograph now part of the poem? (8 minutes)

Short introduction to triptych form, triptych in paintings.

Write: Using the same image, write three different poems from it. Each of ten lines, each from a different perspective. This could be the photographer, the subject, someone not in the photograph but present beyond the range of the camera. (15 minutes)

Share: Ask participants to reflect on how the nature of inquiry changed their perspective of the image, how the exercise felt, what did it bring up for them. (3-5 minutes)

WORKSHOP 5

Main activities

Listen: Excerpt (vocabulary) from *Alien Suite* (Elhillo, 2016)

Read: *Patient Intake Questionnaire* (Bird, 2017)
My Mother's Teeth (Chang, 2020)

Discuss: What do participants like in the poem? What do they think of the use of form? (15 minutes)

Activity: Ask participants to choose a non-literary form from daily life. This could be a letter, a notice, an automated email or text message, a poster, a recipe, an instruction manual.

Once they've made their choice, ask them to write down the usual wording/ format of chosen form.

Write:

A. Using the form, ask participants to write in between the lines or to write an honest response to these forms. They could write about a subject of their choosing but the point is to interrupt the flow and narrative of the form they have chosen with their own word choices. (5 minutes)

B. Ask participants to read over what they have written and choose parts from both (chosen form and their writing) to create a hybrid poem. (8 minutes)

Share: What did the exercise bring up for them? Did the process of interruption throw up anything interesting for them? (10 minutes)

WORKSHOP 6

Main activities

Activity: Provide participants copies of the local newspaper. Ask them to pick a section or two. Once they have chosen a section, create a poem using only the words in that section. They can be used in any order and can be changed in tense, as long as the root word is the same. (15 minutes)

Listen and then read: *Miami Airport* (Antrobus, 2017)

Discuss: What do the questions and silences mean? (5 minutes)

Creative Writing Gets Different

Write: A list of questions asked to you or that you have asked someone. Play with the order but construct a poem only of questions. (5 minutes)

Read: *The Golden Shovel* (Hayes, 2017)

Provide brief introduction to *The Golden Shovel* form.

Activity: Ask participants to pick a line from their own writing of no more than ten words. Ask them to write a poem using the Golden Shovel form with the chosen line. (15 minutes)

Using a contemporary and recently established form is useful in remembering that the inherited forms too were once invented. Encountering the Duplex, the Gimbal and the Golden Shovel excited me to the formal possibilities in poetry. Explaining the contexts in which the form was created or why, how it has been used helped unlearn the associations of form with rigidity and restraint.

Share: How did the exercise feel? Did the constraints bring out surprises or did it feel too restrictive? Ask participants to share parts of the poem, or the whole poem with the group, if they feel compelled. (5 minutes)

Read and listen: *Tonight* (Ali, 2003)

Ghazal: With Prayer (Beck, 2019)

Discuss: Brief introduction to Ghazal, its origins, purposes. How does the use of repetition work in favour of these poems? (10 minutes)

Activity: Ask participants to thumb through previous pages of their writing. Ask them to circle through recurring words in poems or free-writes. Pick three words. Of the three, choose one that is versatile and open to multiple possibilities (for instance, see could be rewritten as sea, see-saw). (8 minutes)

Write a poem using the Ghazal form, with the chosen word as refrain. (20 minutes)

Share: Ask participants to share part, if not the whole poem with the group. Provide feedback (one thing that you liked, one thing that could be further explored in the next draft, one thing that stood out to you) to each and encourage other participants to chime in.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Introduction to form can be a Sisyphean task. Through this session, I intend to provide them with different levels of working with constraints - moving from found poetry to something as advanced as a ghazal. Having previously introduced forms such as odes, or triptychs, participants should already have or begin to have an awareness of the uses of form and how they can help realise the thought even better in the poem.

Through these sessions, the participants should have found poems they feel connected to, relate to and remember beyond this class. Through the constant use of free writes or writing activities after reading a poem, they should be accustomed to writing in a group setting, writing often and sometimes sharing what might be a seed for the poem. These exercises will provide them with different ways of thinking they can further incorporate into their writing journeys. Additionally, it gives them imaginative ways and opens their eyes to the poetic possibilities in their daily lives and the languages they have access to.

NEXT STEPS

Further sessions would include asking participants to come up with their own form, ways to revise poems and giving each other feedback. The poems read during these sessions and the questions asked after each reading should help participants gain confidence in how they express themselves. The occasional introduction of techniques and terminology will strengthen their vocabulary when giving feedback or recognising forms and tropes in poems.

While these sessions are written with an in-person audience and sharing in mind, it can be adopted for a virtual, more inclusive

Creative Writing Gets Different

space where poems can be screen-shared, passing around of material could be done through private chat and smaller discussion groups by means of breakout rooms can be utilised. A virtual workshop series would include a different set of considerations (less time, more breaks to prevent screen fatigue, sending material via email) to work best.

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CREATIVE RESPONSES TO MUSIC AND MINDFULNESS: GABRIEL TROIANO

I CAN NEVER BE OPEN AGAIN

I can never be me,
In this maze of self-reclusion
Drifting pages of my heart
Guiding darkness to deeper realms

I can never see me,
Only a projection
A reflection,
The shell of consummate reality

I can never let me,
Let me be,
Be the end I desire
To release the chains of dread

I can never be me,
I can never be open again,
I can never dream
And be open again.

**WHERE THE CRUEL AND HUNGRY AND
MEAN THINGS ARE**

Where the cruel and hungry and mean things are
This is where I find myself
Clutching at the marks on my skin
Hoping for the hope that fled away

The place that I find myself
Moves with no limit
Like a shaking ground beneath
Falling endlessly into the dark

The place where screens
Are met with faces of despair
Faces that cry
Because gravity pulls them in

And I wonder
If there is a miracle left
A siren to uncurse me
To rid the collective self-conscious pride

The place where we don't live
Nor exist, nor behave
In ways of old
Because we, you have created monsters

Burly ventures with vertical greed
Wanting to reach for the sun
Until Helios comes
To put you back where you belong—in the ground

Who am I in this place?
Where the cruel and hungry and mean things are
Where the moment is broken through swift purchases
Only to escape the inescapable

To cheat the life that has always been
Fight for freedom in the freedom that is
Leaving space for no one
Not me, that's for sure
To shut the door and throw the key.

A NATURAL STATE

To be this,
Or that,
That which scares
Yet grants the illusion,
Glorious extroversion,
Of a grander self

For me,
My body,
Is not fully equipped,
To withstand such toll.
Grab me a chair,
A sinking sun,
And let me be,
Watch the creation,
Line by line
As I drift
Drift...
Into a natural state.

NIGHT

I know
That when the warmth
And brilliance of spring comes
I'll be on my own
With little to give
Little to receive
As all my anchors

Drift away in the midst
Of that cold winter daze
Which held me
Through the thickness of the clock
And the mechanical routine
All embraced by rains
Puffing in the window near me
Reminding of where I belong
Not here
Not know
But in the far reaches
Of the white sun
That does more
To inspire and caress me
Than the blooming of the day
Ever, ever did
So I decide to be here
A stranger to the minutes, hours
Awaiting the longest passage
Until the day recedes
Surely and slowly
To bring about
The embracing night.

DREAM THEATER AND THE LOCKDOWN FAN

Every day is the same
A stone crushing glass
On the winter morning
Great,
Yet again woken up
By noiseless voices
Demented fragments of the past
Or is it the future?

The pair of white ear-ins
Is all I have

A doorway to Satan's luxurious heaven
Sweet, magnifying sound
Of Petrucci's bends
DT's melodious compositions
It is truly,
All I will ever need

In this moment of static
Utmost homogeneity
I lay and listen
Auditory observation
How good it is
To fight the plague
With synchronous instruments
Turned to the maximum.

MOMENT

Before the shutting of the eyes,
Before the impeccable dedication,
Before the self-reflective stares,
Long before pride took a breath,
I found solace,
In knowing the truth

Transcending all the lights,
Destinies,
Peaks,
Cracks,
Little patches of dirt here and there,
A visceral reality,
That I found

But it vanished,
Giving way to the unrelenting,
Frantic desperation,
Of waking life

If only I could touch it once more,
Breathe its soft vines
As I touched my grandfather's hand
In that ethereal sun,
And I felt,
The vastness of love itself

How do I ask
And forgive myself,
For not trying
Joining forces
With the great beyond?

For it was truly,
A sign of life
The heartbeat that felt
Like never before
The child,
The man,
That still searches,
Faintly grasping,
A moment in time.

DRAGON KINGS

I saw there
Chewing and eating away
Ripping flesh and bone
Devouring piece of I
The great dragon king
Alive by its fearful instinct
Consumed in its eye of hate

In a cave by the mountain
Where monsters and kings dwell
I hold my spade and shield
To fight the ugliness of the beast incarnate
To hold steadfast the ground

That I have left behind
But will someday reach and step on

I saw a monster
Yet again
Tooth, claw, and fire inside
The cave so dark and open
That will not cease to darken
Until I start to dig
Dig within I to find me
And the dragon lying there
Showing I the way of life
Through the heart tug underneath
Core, antidote of monstrosity.

THE MINDFULLY MUSICAL LESSON PLAN

LESSON 1

Learning objectives

To introduce the idea/concept of music and mindfulness to inspire further writing.

Starter

Activate Prior Knowledge (APK): What do we know about music and writing? What do we know about mindfulness?

'Diagart'/brainstorm your ideas/share with the group.

Mindfulness starter

For ten minutes, students listen to a guided meditation.

'Sit upright in a straight-backed chair. Your spine should be allowed to adopt its natural shape in a relaxed but dignified posture. Place your hands on your lap or wherever they feel most comfortable to you. Allow your body to settle in, letting gravity do all the work for you. Gently close your eyes and begin

Creative Writing Gets Different

to breathe and relax. Notice your breath moving in and out of your body. Notice your feet touching the ground, the sounds you can hear around you, any smells you can smell, just be aware of those things. Also, pay attention to how your body feels, are there any parts that need a little more attention, perhaps some parts that are stiffer? If so, start elongating your breath, making sure your inhales are long and full, and your exhales deep and cleansing. Keep doing this for about 8 more minutes, breathing in and out softly. If thoughts come, as they will, try to be mindful about them and if you can, keep focusing on your breath. You will see that as you focus more and more on your breath, your thoughts will dissolve. Most importantly, be kind to yourself, it is perfectly normal to feel some resistance when meditating. Just remember to focus on your breath and the space surrounding you.' (Penman, 2015)

Main activity

Choose your favourite piece of music out of a selection and free write for ten minutes. The teacher can have the choice of observing students' selections and setting up a schedule for the next person who will bring a song for the next lesson. Therefore, students can organize between themselves who will be the representative for the next lesson and what song they will choose.

Plenary

Share free writing (could share in smaller groups) and comment on the activity.

LESSON 2

Learning objectives

To develop your creativity in response to music that suggests anger; to write creatively after being inspired by music; to learn how music and writing can heal.

The teacher provides a model

Your own free writing in response to angry music. Consider when/how/why you might show this writing to your students.

'I can never be me,
In this maze of self-reclusion
Drifting pages of my heart
Guiding darkness to deeper realms

I can never see me,
Only a projection
A reflection,
The shell of consummate reality

I can never let me,
Let me be,
Be the end I desire
To release the chains of dread

I can never be me,
I can never be open again,
I can never dream
And be open again.'

Mindfulness starter

For 10 minutes, students listen to a guided meditation.

Starter

APK on anger; what makes you angry? Free write about this for ten minutes.

Main activity

Have students play their own selection of angry music, e.g. heavy metal, classical, and then they list what they feel as they listen to it; list the images they see; maybe rank the music according to what makes them most angry.

Plenary

What have students learnt? What do they want to learn more about? What helps them learn?

LESSON 3

Learning objectives

To explore music and fear; to write stories, poems, life writing inspired by the music, not about it.

The teacher provides a model

Your own free writing in response to fearful/suspenseful music. Consider when/how/why you might show this writing to your students.

'Where the cruel and hungry and mean things are
This is where I find myself
Clutching at the marks on my skin
Hoping for the hope that fled away

The place that I find myself
Moves with no limit
Like a shaking ground beneath
Falling endlessly into the dark

The place where screens
Are met with faces of despair
Faces that cry
Because gravity pulls them in

And I wonder
If there is a miracle left
A siren to uncurse me
To rid the collective self-conscious pride

The place where we don't live
Nor exist, nor behave
In ways of old
Because we, you have created monsters

Burly ventures with vertical greed
Wanting to reach for the sun
Until Helios comes
To put you back where you belong – in the ground

Who am I in this place?
Where the cruel and hungry and mean things are
Where the moment is broken through swift purchases
Only to escape the inescapable

To cheat the life that has always been
Fight for freedom in the freedom that is
Leaving space for no one
Not me, that's for sure
To shut the door and throw the key.'

Mindfulness starter

For ten minutes, students listen to a guided meditation.

Starter

APK on fear; what makes you fearful? Free write about this for ten minutes.

Main activity

Have students play their own selection of fearful music, e.g. movie soundtrack, classical, and then they list what they feel as they listen to it; list the images they see; maybe rank the music according to what makes them most fearful.

Plenary

What have students learnt? What do they want to learn more about? What helps them learn?

LESSON 4

Learning objectives

To investigate creative responses to music and joy.

The teacher provides a model

Your own free writing in response to joyful music OR share a memory with music that made you feel happy and joyous. For this, you can show students a drawing explaining the memory, a story, or anything that you want students to know about the memory itself. Consider when/how/why you might show this to your students.

'To be this,
Or that,
That which scares
Yet grants the illusion,
Glorious extroversion,
Of a grander self

For me,
My body,
Is not fully equipped,
To withstand such toll.
Grab me a chair,
A sinking sun,
And let me be,
Watch the creation,
Line by line
As I drift
Drift...
Into a natural state.'

Mindfulness starter

For ten minutes, students listen to a guided meditation.

Starter

APK on joy; what makes you full of joy? Free write/draw/'diagram'/brainstorm about this for ten minutes.

Main activity

Have students play their own selection of joyful music, e.g. pop song, classic rock song, and then they write about what they feel as they listen to it; the images they see; they could also draw what is going on in their heads.

Plenary

What have they learnt? What do they want to learn more about? What helps them learn? Do you like the mixed modes of learning (drawing/writing/'diagramming')?

LESSON 5

Learning objectives

To devise an anthology of music, creative writing and the emotions.

Mindfulness starter

For ten minutes, students listen to a guided meditation.

Check-in with students

What have you learnt so far and what would you like to learn more about? Have you liked the opportunity to learn and grow on your own?

The teacher provides a model

Your own anthology of poems based on songs or artists you have heard. Explain how each song captured a specific emotion within you, further developing the concept of music and writing as a healing mechanism.

Starter

Have students think about how to devise the anthology, how would they compile everything? Get them to choose two activities from previous lessons and find out a way to make them work together. They could separate the lessons by the emotions they felt or the songs they heard or anything that they want to do. This should take about ten minutes.

Main activity

Creative Writing Gets Different

Students organise what they have done throughout the course, separating their artistic creations based on the emotions and songs that correspond to those emotions. Students can create anything they want with it, they could do some collage by cutting up their poems and mixing some words or phrases together, they could reflect on the experience and write about how they felt as they created through the act of listening to music, and so on.

It is important here to give students maximum liberty to do and behave as if they were on their own, with the teacher guiding them if need be.

Plenary

What have you learned? How are the different emotions interlinked with music and creative writing?

LESSON 6

Learning objective

To learn from each other's creative writing about music and the emotions.

Teacher provides some guidance

Teacher explains the purpose of the last lesson. As this will be more of a collective effort to understand the relationship between music, emotions, and creative writing, the teacher explains the benefits of having this teamwork as part of the course (students share stories between themselves which leads to greater empathy, compassion, etc).

'Now that you've all gone
And worked your way up
Leading individually
Learning with yourselves
Creating beautiful memories
While listening to great music
It is now time to gather
Join forces

To communicate creatively
To discuss and cherish
To share and value
The work that you have done
With the talented students of the class.'

Mindfulness starter

For 10 minutes, students listen to a guided meditation.

Starter

Free write for ten minutes what you learned so far, how has this course impacted you as a person? What would you like to learn more about? Do you have any concerns?

Main activity

Students get together in groups, preferably smaller groups of two or three people. Each student shares their experience on how the course has been for them and what they have learned in the journey. Students can also share their own responses to previous lessons while the other members of the group raise their own opinions with a 'workshop' attitude. That is, each member has the opportunity to give constructive criticism on a particular creative piece in order to allow for growth and improvement.

Plenary

Share the results of the discussion with the teacher, leading into a broader discussion about the purpose of the course, lessons, and the main theory behind the activities: Cognitive constructivism.

WHO IS THE LESSON PLAN FOR?

This lesson plan is primarily marketed towards first-year undergraduates who already have experience in writing and developing their own processes in relation to this art form. Because of this pre-existing knowledge, students of this level are more likely to engage critically with their pieces and interact with

the lesson plan as it pertains to their personal and professional interests. This audience is also very conducive to utilizing art, particularly music, as a form of inspiration and as a tool for greater self-awareness. However, even though the lesson plan itself is targeted towards the aforesaid group, the broader objective is for creative writing teachers to utilize it as a reference point in their own work. As creative writing teaching has become a growing field of study and practice throughout academia, these activities would aid individuals who not only want to become better educators, but also more complete creatives. In that sense, these 'creative educators' would benefit from a larger understanding of themselves and the world around them by engaging in a lesson plan that stimulates their creativity and critical thinking skills. Therefore, the conjunction of music, healing, and writing would be the creative enabler that these writers and educators are constantly searching for in their personal and professional lives.

UNVEILING THE LINES: WHY CHOOSE MUSIC AS A WRITING AND HEALING STIMULUS?

For as long as I can recall, music has taken a pivotal role in the formation and development of my character. Now living in London after growing up in Brazil and graduating with my undergraduate degree in the United States, the art of music has helped me overcome many obstacles in ways that I couldn't have ever imagined. As a kid living in the suburbs of São Paulo, Brazil, I was always surrounded by music, whether it was the radio players that my dad owned swooshing out symphonies from sunrise to sunset, or my uncle's innate ability with the nylon guitar. Therefore, this simple yet extremely touching tool echoed into my other creative endeavours that I had also been cultivating for a significant part of my childhood. Among these, came the act of writing, which was largely fuelled by the musical encounters that were generously and perhaps passively transmuted to me by select members of my family. As time rolled by, as it so often does, music became not only a healing space and an oasis from the storms of reality, but it affected my writing to the point of

becoming a necessary stimulus as part of the winding creative process.

As with these personal and affective reasonings to the project at hand, music, healing, and poetry are the fruits and roots in and of themselves, as these have been majorly explored by different lenses in academia and beyond.

Music and healing have always held a special fascination for researchers in the field of psychology and the humanities. Music therapy in dementia care patients, for example, is particularly helpful because the arts 'operate at an emotional level, don't require rational language, and allow communication and connection with family/staff/the greater world.' (Basting, 2006, p. 17) In the same context, it has also been shown to reduce agitation in dementia patients (Craig, 2014). In itself, music is a very effective tool to create personal and social awareness, lifting the veil behind the unconscious and coming to terms with our innermost feelings and emotions, or as George Gershwin put it: 'Music sets up a certain vibration which unquestionably results in a physical reaction. Eventually the proper vibration for every person will be found and utilized.' (Gershwin, AZ Quotes) In addition, Thomas' research on music and different forms of healing on patients found that 'heart rate, blood pressure, and oxygen consumption decrease when the right type of music is played. This auditory stimulus positively affects the patient physiologically and psychologically.' (Thomas, 2014)

Because of such strong correlation, I had to make use of this auditory resource in ways that would enhance my writing and subsequent healing. To do this, I adapted William Todd Anderson's idea of mindful listening in addition to my own meditation routine (Anderson 2013). By doing so, the words and verses seemed to flow with more ease and my ideas were generally clearer than if hadn't taken the steps aforementioned. It is also important to note that, as a form of creative writing, poetry holds connections with music and healing, especially in the development of songs and albums by various music artists.

THE CREATIVE PROCESS AND ITS METHODS

In this project, I wanted to further exemplify ways in which music could serve as a platform for healing and as a stimulus for creative writing. In order to do this, I had to rely on some mindfulness tools which would serve as facilitators in the listening of songs and composing of the poems contained within this study. To help answer these questions, I introduced a meditative intervention prior to my writing and listening sessions by following Dr. Danny Penman's routine for mindfulness and creativity (Penman, 2015). This intervention was undertaken during the first two weeks of March 2021. The routine itself consisted of two ten-minute sessions. Prior to the routine, I would shut my phone off and not access the device for the duration of the exercise. I would also prepare myself by introducing informal methods of mindfulness such as washing the dishes or taking a brief walk outside. While doing these, my objective was to concentrate on my breathing and act as if my awareness was fully enveloped into that specific task. During the meditation, present moment thinking and body scans were utilized as tools. Perhaps, the most vital part of this intervention was utilizing the breath as a calming mechanism. By breathing in deeply and elongating the outbreath, I would be creating 'a bridge between the mind and body.' (Hanh, 1999)

After completing the meditation, I took on to listening and writing. In the listening sessions, I took out a selection of different songs that would represent and cause different emotions within me. These, in their turn, were anger, fear, and joy. In addition, I would make sure that I was listening with all my attention, leaving everything behind and focusing entirely on the sonic journey embedded within the songs themselves. With regards to the writing portion of the process, I utilized freewriting, an exercise initially marketed by Peter Elbow in which the writer ignores their inner critic and produces content similar to that of a subconscious flow (Elbow, 1998).

COGNITIVE CONSTRUCTIVISM AND THE MINDFULLY MUSICAL LESSON PLAN

The choice to implement Cognitive Constructivism and writing in response to mindfulness and music was a deliberate one. This relates to both audiences in the lesson plan, first-year undergraduate students and creative writing teachers. With university students, mental health is of increasing concern globally (Macaskill, 2012). Kadison & Digeronimo have also pointed out an existing crisis in mental health care at colleges (Kadison & Digeronimo, 2004). Because of this, the models and lessons set in place allow students to come up with their own words to what they might be feeling and experiencing on a daily basis. By doing this, they enable themselves to express freely on the empty page, who, more often than not, acts a 'reboundless' surface. That is, the page itself has no ties or inherent connection to the person doing the writing and therefore, will not act as a judgemental force. In this manner, the theory of Cognitive Constructivism is an appropriate one because, in its core, it allows students to 'make sense of the world by thinking through things for themselves.' (Gilbert, 2017). Therefore, healing is a natural consequence to the actions that are undertaken throughout the course itself.

Conversely, creative writing educators, for whom this lesson plan is ultimately aimed at, would especially benefit from this liberal and creative approach. Cognitive Constructivism is the original and perhaps, conservative way that writers utilize to develop their craft, learning by themselves through the implementation of personal goals (Gilbert, 2017). In addition, for teachers who identify themselves solely for the position that they practice, this lesson plan and theory behind it would allow these professionals to expand their horizons and view their contributions in a more creative lens. By doing so, studies have found that 'teachers who perceived themselves as writers offered richer classroom writing experiences and generated increased enjoyment, motivation and tenacity among their students than 'non-writers.' (Cremin & Oliver, 2017)

Creative Writing Gets Different

Considering these justifications, the models and creative responses set in place act as a reference point to allow for a greater connection, which necessarily takes place upon one's own identity and healing. In particular, there are two models that exemplify this mentality and that aid in advancing the main focal points of the Cognitive Constructivism theory for both audiences. The first one, entitled *Where the cruel and mean and hungry things are*, is a poetic exploration of a fearful emotion, whereby fear is the centre and cause of various negative observations that tackle internal and external perspectives. In this sense, the model acts as a tool to stimulate students and creative writing educators who, in their own personal journeys of amendment, become driven to produce meaningful breakthroughs via written communication. Granted that the poem itself is imbedded with harsh and perhaps, traumatic signals, it still holds the same questioning and curiosity that pertains to the very essence of the theory at hand. That is, the brief yet impactful moments in the poem such as the verses below, are utilized to envision concrete idealizations where individuals are invigorated by the promise of a better, brighter world:

'And I wonder
If there is a miracle left
A siren to uncurse me
To rid the collective self-conscious pride.'

By adding this model to the fore in conjunction with music and mindfulness as catalytic resources, the audiences are introduced to individual sense making. This, in turn, will provide the sufficient needs to craft individual thought patterns that are a fundamental aspect of self and collective comprehension.

The second model entitled *A natural state* grants students and educators alike with the ability to delve into the breath, much like in the mindfulness exercise in the lesson plan, whereby they are encouraged to stop and focus on the present moment. The lines below illustrate this clarifying capacity:

'Grab me a chair,
A sinking sun,
And let me be,
Watch the creation,
Line by line.'

In the many interpretations that may arise from this poem, the original checkpoint is centred upon students' and educators' ability to represent the feeling of joy. By doing this whilst or after listening to a piece of joyful music, the power of Cognitive Constructivism is in full display, as this particular feeling can be a great motivator to instigate compassion within individuals. As such, it comes to no surprise that many artists choose to explore a joyful or tender moment as the main 'motif' for their creations. Finally, joy is an emotion that radiates acceptance and compassion from many of us, so it can give the audiences addressed in this lesson plan a great deal of courage to deal with their traumas with an ever-increasing level of introspection. Through this introspection is where the aim of Cognitive Constructivism can be found, where the individual encounters his shadow and works to untether itself from it. Or, as Socrates put it on the meaning of such endeavours: 'The unexamined life is not worth living.' (Socrates, Goalcast)

The underlying purpose of such inquiries, however abstract and tenuous they might seem to outside audiences, is to create a space where individuals are able to be inspired by the promise of Cognitive Constructivism. That is, the lesson plan is a gateway for individuals, whether students or educators, to understand themselves on a deeper level whilst enhancing their mindfulness and writing skills. Because creative writing in itself is a topic of great mystery and unexploredness in academia and beyond, the models and lesson plan also deals with these issues, lifting the tabu that 'it requires a writer to write.' Much contrary to this belief, writing, creativity, and mindfulness are resources to be understood and practiced by persons of all ages and backgrounds, thus lending itself to the consequential healing benefits. Even more surprising is the reality of many creative writing educators in relation to the act of writing, as 'relatively little appears to be

Creative Writing Gets Different

known about teachers' attitudes to writing, their sense of themselves as writers and the potential impact of teacher writing on pedagogy or student outcomes in writing.' (Cremin & Oliver, 2017) Therefore, it seems paramount that teachers and their students heed to writing, as seen in the lesson plan, to achieve greater comprehension, both at the perceptual level, but primarily in the subconscious level.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this project, I have aimed to highlight the importance of writing and its procedural aids in music and mindfulness. By doing so, I wish to have encouraged both students and educators to reignite their passion for creativity and to leap forward in their own quests towards self-acceptance and compassion. As aforementioned, I have been greatly involved in these sonic and spiritual worlds because of my background and have witnessed the understated power these hold. To lift the veil behind these processes, as has been done in this critical commentary, is to put faith in the life-changing act of introspection.

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WHERE PATHS COME TOGETHER WITH OTHER PATHS: RYAN WHATLEY

CREATIVE CULTURE AS A MEDIATING TOOL FOR
MEANING-MAKING IN THE KS3 CLASSROOM

RATIONALE

Adopting principles from Dorothy Heathcote's 'Mantle of the expert' (Aitkin, 2018) and applying them to creative writing and assessment frameworks, this paper aims to redress dialogical practices as a 'trialogical' site (Hennessy, 2011) for decolonised knowledge (Begum and Sani, 2019) to be freely produced and propagated within a mainstream educational setting. As a practicing poet and classroom teacher of English, these praxeological considerations are placed at the source of creative writing pedagogies which promote writing as therapy (Bolton, 2011) and which thread them through an appreciation of current educational needs in the KS3 classroom (Watkins, 2010).

Drawing from an exploration of mediational tools in creative writing (Khimji and Maunder, 2012) and creative assessment models, (Morris and Sharplin, 2013) this paper aims to provide educational practitioners with a contribution towards the positive horizons of a pedagogy of emancipation, grounded in creative writing, constructed as a means to establish cultural action for freedom (Freire, 2000).

WHY? THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19 AND THE OPPORTUNITY OF DIGITAL PROVISION

One of the most significant public health measures during the COVID-19 pandemic has been the extended periods of lockdown

and the closures of schools nationwide. At the beginning of 2021, via its 'Get help with technology scheme,' the Department for Education had delivered over 800,000 laptops to disadvantaged pupils across the UK, without providing schools with the software security to ensure the child's safety and wellbeing. Considering the UK's disproportionate levels in literacy, its under-serviced ICT infrastructure, its growing social stratification and increasing cultural capital deficits, it is clear that the imposed conditions of lockdown created a problem-posing period (Freire, 1970) widely understood by the educational community as a period of increasing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). In this context, the shift from children in schools towards children 'homeschooled' by responsible adults can be framed as a moment of synthesis and as a transitional stage (Freire, 2000) in the development of the teacher-student relationship.

According to Youngminds (2021), 75% of respondents reported that the current lockdown was harder to cope with than the previous ones, whilst a further 67% believe that the pandemic will have a long-term effect on their mental health. Surely, then, the trauma caused by the epidemic and the impact of children returning to school, requires a liberating praxis (Freire, 1970), a multi-situational place for learning and also an ecology for healing which goes beyond the mere provision of a 'catch-up curriculum.' This type of reflexive awareness in the UK's teaching body is a crucial next step to avoid what Freire (1974) would call 'massification' and what shall be referred to here as inauthentic democratic teaching and learning.

That being said, the question of useful knowledge and useful wisdom as a 'fund' or a 'neighbourhood knowledge' (Thomason and Hall, 2008) is paramount to such an awareness and presents itself at the centre of this paper whereto the culture of creative writing should be seen as a form of *funding* new learning inquiries for both the student and the teacher. Responding to the times, this paper advocates that the classroom teacher should make use of a place-responsive learning environment which celebrates the digital artefact as a learning site, (Hennessy, 2011) if new areas of dialogical inquiry are to be discovered (Alexander, 2018).

HOW? CREATIVE WRITING AS MEDIATING TOOL

Arguably, most children hold the perception that schools are merely 'institutions for indoctrination and for imposing obedience' (Chomsky, 2000) whereas, ironically, the majority of educational practitioners undertake their role with the belief that they are contributing towards creating the best conditions for learning (Lambirth, 2016). However, the deadly space between these two positions is, in my opinion, a furtive ground. An authentic democratic educator is one who knows that what ultimately counts in schools is the extent to which teaching requires pupils to think and not just report someone else's thinking (Alexander, 2018). To paraphrase the author and philosopher Iris Murdoch, these educators are willing to break with tradition and use education to provide the conditions necessary for children to not only feel happy, but to realise that their happiness is dependent on their freedom. That said, educators of this kind promote education as the means to which students can realise their freedom. Therefore, a framework for liberty in learning, that is, freedom from authoritative pressures to think a certain way must be established for an authentically democratic classroom. A pedagogy of emancipation and writer's identities (Vetter, 2011) positioned against arbitrary teaching habits - such as Initiation Response Feedback (IRF) learning activities - should, therefore, be addressed and sought after through a reflective practice and a continuous ethos of reform in teaching strategies. It then follows that in order for teaching practice to change within the school setting, rather than to revolt against it, a radical recasting of teaching and learning outcomes must take place within the Department for Education's Teaching Standards. Within educational nomenclature, this means a radical recasting of 'assessment' within the classroom and 'attainment' for the student learner must take place.

Creative writing is not only a vehicle to engage with deeper language structures (Chomsky, 2000) but also a cultural vehicle for development (Moll, 1994) as a site for emancipation for both

teacher and student alike. It is a Gramscian site of interchange between the base and superstructure of culture and society (Williams, 2005) but on a micro-scale. Likewise, as a mediating tool (Khimji and Maunder, 2012), writing creatively and imaginatively provides educators with *a priori* of liberty within the classroom and, therefore, presupposes an assessment model which is perspicuous in its logic. Creative writing, in this light, can only be authentic creative writing once it has an assessment framework which is place-responsive, in as much as it is determined by culture and politics, and enables the local context of the students' lives (William, 2014).

WHAT? A 5-STAGE MULTI-MODAL WRITING AND ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

As everything a teacher does in the field of a child's learning is a form of intervention, it is fair to say that a paradox is tied to the heart of any pedagogy of emancipation. One way of navigating a way out of this gordian knot is to follow Wiliam's (2014) suggestions to move away from a fixed to a negotiated flightpath of student learning by empowering students to become 'owners of their own learning' through 'activating students as instructional resources for one another' and by 'sharing learning intentions' with each student aiming to establish their own writer's identity (Vetter, 2011). These broader strategies can be brought into practice through a dynamic, multimodal writing and assessment frame which promotes child-centredness at each stage of the students' learning.

STAGE 1: A CREATIVE ASSESSMENT MODEL

Why is it important for teachers to design their assessment framework in response to their own classes? Analogously, if we imagine a student on their way to school, before that student dresses for the day, it is expected that each child has been shown how to check the weather. However, this is not always the case. Nor can we assume that each child will respond to the weather outside their window with adequate clothing; further still, most

Creative Writing Gets Different

teachers are oblivious to the reality of whether that child has access to warm clothes on a winter's day, or waterproofs when it's raining. In reality, most children 'make do.' Similarly, with creative writing, many students 'make do' in a classroom culture and, metaphorically speaking, brave the weather of creative writing.

Since the advent of online learning, teachers across the UK have attended and attuned to the home learning environments for each of their students. If cultural capital is to be truly addressed, the culture of the classroom cannot ignore this new development in the teacher-student relationship. Creative assessment models are intrinsically linked to classroom culture and can be used to support educators towards taking the necessary steps away from an outcomes-based understanding of attainment and into a new arena in which genuine participant attainment is the primary outcome. Students, when they write creatively, enter into writing for different reasons. A piece of creative writing can serve the participant with moments of exploration, reflection, healing, creativity, rebellion and more.

Merging the praxeology which underpins Robin Alexander's (2018) principles for developing dialogic teaching, the discussions between Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said (2004) regarding the East Western Divan Orchestra project, as well as the workshops explored with Dr. Francis Gilbert during the MA in Creative Writing and Education at Goldsmiths University, the following assessment frame has been devised for a KS3 classroom participating in creative writing and outlines the type and modes of formative assessment used by the teacher:

Figure 1.

'Looky Listeners' - Character Guidance For Facilitators

Examiner - listens to the content and organisation; speaks directly about assessment objective

Author - listens to the voice of the writing; speaks about the craft and shapes of meaning

Healer - listens to the implications of the work; speaks to recognise the writer's hurts

Rebel – listens to the beating pulse of composition; speaks to incite the breaking of rules

Mirror Master – listens to the integrity of the writing; speaks through an analogy

Mime – listens to the action within the text; speaks without words

Following an in-role approach (Aitkin, 2018) to feedback, the basic shape of the assessment frame has been designed to meet the Global Citizen priorities (2021) in the form of six characters. These prototype characters have been designed and 'chunked' for KS3 students so that they can initially grasp the shape of each assessment frame. Once outlined, following each piece of creative writing, the students are then to be invited and encouraged to select a character in which the facilitator provides an in-role formative assessment. That being said, the characters should not remain entirely static. The criteria of each rubric should be made dynamic through dialogical discussion and agreement, as per the scheme of work, resulting in collaborative mark scheme descriptors representative of the many voices of the students and what they see as constituting attainment within the class. This will enable students to 'write the rubric' of their own learning and to set their writing intentions before participating in the task. In accordance with the 'eliminating unnecessary workload around marking,' Report of the Independent Teacher Workload Review Group (2016), these actions fall within the effective marking principles and serve to move the teacher away from the 'false comfort' of deep marking and the 'false assumptions' of professionalism within the field, moving the assessment process towards the principles of effective marking by making assessment meaningful, manageable and motivating.

STAGE 2: THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION

Once the assessment framework has been designed, in order for teachers to develop ways of teaching that mediate between a

mainstream education's class-based norms (Watkins, 2010) to the student writer's identity (Vetter, 2011) of what each student sees as authentic attainment (Lambirth, 2016), such a strategy of collaborating on a set of democratic principles for the classroom is an essential task for any pedagogy of emancipation. In collaboration with all the participating members of the classroom, an immersive lesson in which the students collect and create an 'Emancipation Proclamation' can be facilitated by the classroom teacher and signed by all. Delivered to the students as an 'Emancipation Proclamation: for the freedom of the classroom's writers', students are to be invited to contribute towards creating their conditions for liberty in which they can undertake 'passionate pursuit of the real' (Milosz, 1983).

Adopting a social-constructivist approach, the teacher should aim to deliver stem questions designed to enable and embed a classroom situated within a broader democratic, educational ecology. Building the voice and identity of the students and turning them away from their own negative language discourses, this practice aims to 'include (the students) households' funds of knowledge, and the realisation that these funds of knowledge (for the students) can be accessed' (Gonzalez, 2005) not only within the classroom but as the basis of the classroom. Through establishing this type of experiential ethos, students will have contributed towards the conditions in which they feel able to partake in the learning, unimpeded by preconceived negative assumptions of what learning is and what attainment means. Students are to be encouraged to declare what is wrong with learning in school, at home and in society at large. Therefore, the value of a student's home-based knowledge is harnessed, their inherited literary consternations and literacy constrictions are recognised, without judgement, and their funding of what is the right way to learn can be used as 'bona fide resources for teaching and learning in classrooms' (Gonzalez, 2005).

STAGE 3: VOICEPRINTS

'Every student here has a voice, every voice is the key to your own learning.' Voiceprint is a term widely accepted within North American poetry circles. Closely associated with a poet's idiolect and style, it is a concept which can be utilised to break down the distinction between the high and low styles of creative writing. In the UK, its currency within a European poetic tradition is not as highly valued. Here, in accordance with the creative writing scheme of work, the term 'voiceprint' should be understood as part of a strategy to engage reluctant readers to perceive language as a purposeful tool, and as a learning activity in which to draw out a student's language history from their 'virtual school bag.' (Thomson and Hall, 2008)

The concept of a voiceprint can be repurposed as a DARTS task and, through student participation, turned into a rudimentary diagram for how their language identity has been constructed. Once collected as a classroom display, students will be able to address and recognise their inherent diversity as cultural speakers whilst being encouraged to leave their mark, as a seal of agreement, at the beginning of each learning experience.

STAGE 4: FREE WRITING

Similarly, the notion of free-writing as an activity to break down the problematisation of writing and to 'reduce self-consciousness, allowing writers to tap into their strong, wise, creative sides' (Bolton, 2011) should not solely be taken to mean writing without limits, as a form of mark making. If the 'abstract form' rather than the 'organic form' (Read, 1989) of writing is what provides the conditions for the student to write freely, so be it. What the student employs as their means of representation when instructed to compose free-writing could quite as easily be the mental imagery of a bus timetable, as it could be the student's cursive in-and-of-itself, rather than the conventional verse libre or stream-of-conscious composition that we might conventionally expect to see.

Students should be encouraged to ‘respond freely’ to the task at hand and this self-same invitation must then be looked upon indiscriminately as a form of freedom which the writer deems representative of their choice. Results will vary, falling anywhere between and outside of purposeful play and pointless prayer. However, what must remain consistent is the teacher’s unwavering belief that ‘writing provides simple, quiet, private, focused, recorded forms of reflection’ where students can then be invited to pay ‘proper attention to one’s own self.’ (Bolton, 2011)

STAGE 5: DIGITAL ARTEFACTS

The choice of an online digital writing platform such as ‘Twine’ relates to the context of a post-lockdown classroom as much as it relies upon its status as a learning tool outside of the perceived traditions of the teaching space. Here, the invitation for students to use their internet literacy, or ‘netricy’, is also an invitation for them to be drawn away from their language discourses and to move with their teachers ‘into new forms and spaces of productive dialogue between different perspectives’ (Hennessy, 2011). Digital artefacts, such as the Hyperscape Narrative (Wallace, 2012) and Pastiche Poem tasks, are co-constructed by teacher and learner in a method of reciprocal meaning making. The interaction between student expertise, the students’ funds of knowledge and the scrutiny of communal knowledge, as orchestrated by a place-responsive classroom, forms a ‘triological object’ for learning. ‘Interaction takes place through - and knowledge becomes embodied in - mediating artefacts and practices’ (Hennessy, 2011). Educating students on how to locate themselves within this new educational landscape is paramount alongside the need for teachers to engage their reflexive principles as educators and redefine their own language discourses in the wake of future lockdown priorities and shifts in the educational landscape.

WHERE PATHS COME TOGETHER WITH OTHER PATHS:
CREATIVE SCHEME OF WORK FOR A PEDAGOGY OF
EMANCIPATION

The following scheme of work has been designed as a discussion framework for educational practitioners interested in promoting the culture of creative writing as a mediating tool for learning within a mainstream school setting. This sequence of lessons has been designed as a starting point in which divergence from and deliberate practice within the scheme will be variable depending on the cohort of students and the conditions of the school setting.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT AND THE ICT TECHNOLOGY

Chinua Achebe's *Dead Men's Path* was chosen as a text which confronts the question of culture clash and the issues at the heart of decolonised knowledge.

Twine is a free, interactive digital learning site which allows students to create and explore other worlds within the text. Facilitators must ensure that they have applied the guided streaming application of Hapara.

LESSON 1

Reflexivity exercise for facilitator

Is your teacher register and body language merely an extension of the school system?

Talk strategy

Is a 'Command, Question, Echo' question strategy a suitable approach today?

Starter

Upon entry, students are greeted at the door and take a folded piece of paper from the 'Sorting Hat' box. On each piece of paper is a number, which corresponds to the number of seats, and a task on the back: 'Write the answer to the question you hope

your neighbour will ask you. When your neighbour sits down, ask them that question.'

Learning exercises

- Facilitator introduces themselves and expresses what pronoun they identify as.
- An Interactive Whiteboard Display of a fingerprint is shown on the screen and the facilitator responds to the image and what it represents and then responds to the questions around the fingerprint about their social, cultural and personal histories. Facilitator should design their questions according to the decolonised self-image they hope to promote.
- Facilitator introduces the 'Looky Listeners' and models how to perform in-role feedback.
- 'Looky Listeners' Character Cards are distributed around the class. (alternating every paragraph)
- Reciprocal reading in-role feedback established.
- Chinua Achebe is introduced as an author who writes from the Nigerian experience. Author's biography introduced to the class. Questions and discussions permitted.
- Facilitator reads *Dead Men's Path*.
- Reciprocal reading in-role feedback promoted.
- 'What's the point of...' discussions about the plot, characters and setting.

Plenary

Participants are invited to write a prequel or a sequel to any of the characters, verb phrases or noun phrases in the story. Students write their narrative by hyperlinking the part of the story, preloaded on the Twine tile, they want to contribute towards. At the end of their story, they submit their request for feedback from one of the 'Looky Listeners' or write a

commentary on their own work and request feedback on their commentary.

Assessment for learning

Facilitator provides written formative feedback, as requested by the participant. Consideration of the same is used to plan 'Emancipation Proclamation' ideas for Lesson 2.

LESSON 2

Reflexivity exercise for practitioner

What does it mean to be an adjunct of the National Curriculum?
How can you embody the informal curriculum?

Talk strategy

Will an analogy provoke deeper thinking for that student's response?

Starter

Students are greeted at the door and invited to take a piece of paper from the 'Sorting Hat' box. On one side is the invitation to 'Enjoy five Deep Slow Breaths', whilst on the other side it says 'Draw a chain link in the shape of an 'O.' Use words you don't like hearing at school to create your 'O.' Students are invited to hold their chain links above their heads for the facilitator's response. The facilitator explains that for this lesson, the only focus is to break the classroom from these old and noisy chains.

Learning exercises

- An image of Abraham Lincoln and slaves from the American Civil War period are displayed on the Interactive White Board.
- Facilitator performs the 'Emancipation Proclamation' as a speech by Abraham Lincoln.

Creative Writing Gets Different

- A discussion is established about what the deeds in the speech might've meant to slaves at that time in history. The discussion is broadened to slaves during different times in history. A distinction between oppression and slavery is raised in the discussion. Students are invited to use the words from their chain to write down one thing in school they find oppressive which, if freed from, would benefit every student.
- Facilitator and students collaborate in their classroom's 'Emancipation Proclamation.'
- Facilitator drops a JAM board link for all students to add their contribution.
- Students contribute what they would like to be freed from whilst in school.
- The deeds are finalised and printed.
- Facilitator invites students to the middle of the classroom and invites students to press their finger on the ink pad provided so that they can sign the deed with their 'Voiceprint.'

Plenary

Students are invited to revisit their Twine tile and identify what they believe to be the most oppressed aspect of the story. Students are then invited to hyperlink and write a piece of free-writing either for or as what they have identified. Once the students have finished, class examples are read aloud and shared within the group. The author of the work requests feedback from one of the 'Looky Listeners.'

Assessment for learning

Facilitator reviews the contents of the 'Emancipation Proclamation' for the planning of classroom environment and teacher delivery of Lesson 3.

LESSON 3

Reflexivity exercise for practitioner

In what ways are you tolerant and accepting of a person and their peoples' needs to feel secure? Allow yourself to pause your role as facilitator.

Talk strategy

For this lesson you can speak as the 'Looky Listener' you want to be.

Starter

Students are greeted at the door and invited to take one of the 'Looky Listener' character cards. On one side is the character's name and on the other is a list of their attributes, each written above individual likert scales. Students are invited to either adjust the levels for their character or to write their own attributes in the spaces provided. The facilitator reads the denouement of *Dead Men's Path* and coordinates an in-role discussion of appealing moments and new discoveries through the focus of each of the 'Looky Listeners' character profiles.

Learning exercises

- Students are invited to become co-authors with any 'Looky Listener' character in the classroom, as long as they are a different character to the one they are playacting.
- In pairs or small groups, students are handed a piece of paper with the writing, 'What I always say is: let the hawk perch and let the eagle perch.'
- Students are invited to explain what this mystical phrase means and are challenged to persuade the others that their interpretation is the correct one, explaining why.
- Students use their own character cards to scaffold their responses and to stay in character.

Plenary

Students are invited to hyperlink this same phrase and to free-write as their character, as themselves or as one of the characters they were most persuaded by.

Assessment for learning

Facilitator collects the 'Looky Listener' cards from the students to review and creates a nexus of the participants' assessment criteria.

LESSON 4

Reflexivity exercise for practitioner

How do you make a third space in the classroom?

Talk strategy

If an answer does not give rise to a new question from itself, it falls out of the dialogue.

Starter

Students are greeted at the door by Mr Obi (facilitator) and Mr Ani (Learning Support Assistant). Students are immersed in the 'third space' of Chinua Achebe's *Dead Men's Path*. Students are confronted with a new learning site and an atmosphere of culture clash. The following in-role characterisation might help with delivery:

MR OBI

- Voiceprint: curt, stoic, proud but angered.
- Presentation: measured, objective, long pauses before responding to questions.
- Physical space: keeps a professional distance, stands immaculately straight, never smiles, arms and upper body are an adjunct to his authority.

MR ANI

- Voiceprint: warm, wide, proud but healing.

- Presentation: measured, subjective, avuncular giggle before responding to questions.
- Physical space: places hand on students' shoulder when talking with them, stands with a hunched posture, smiles throughout even when frowning, arms and upper body are an adjunct to his feelings.

Learning exercises

The classroom should make use of its resources from relevant departments (i.e., Art, Drama, Design and Technology) and recreate the following quotes or at the least handwrite the below quotations from *Dead Men's Path* onto torn and bedraggled display board paper, so it can be hung on either side of the classroom environment with the effect of a flag or banner.

'Heavy sticks were planted closely across the path at the two places where it entered and left the school premises. These were further strengthened with barbed wire.

The beautiful hedges were torn up not just near the path but right round the school, the flowers trampled to death and one of the school buildings pulled down ...'

Students are divided into two groups and shared as an audience between Mr. Obi and Mr. Ani. Facilitators are to deliver an in-role monologue to each of the groups, presenting their version of events. The students are instructed by both characters to 'see with their own eyes and hear with their own ears' the events that have taken place.

- Mr. Obi will... remind students that they are students of facts and accuracy and to take notes on their Chromebooks and to prepare a credible report for a journalist who will arrive from the Global Express newspaper.
- Mr Ani will... share his story and ask students to tend to the words he speaks as though they were the words of their ancestors.

Plenary

Once students have been an audience for both characters, they are invited to stay within the story and use their Chromebooks to open their Twine tiles. Students are told that the Global Express journalist is on their way, arriving imminently. They are invited to choose a piece of the story which best represents their own version of events, hyperlink the phrase, verb, adjective, adverb or noun, and compose their POV free-write before the journalist leaves.

Assessment for learning

Facilitator reviews and collects the students' choices of phrases, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and nouns to create and compose their own Pastiche Poem for Lesson 5.

LESSON 5

Reflexivity exercise for practitioner

Is the weather outside the classroom or inside the classroom?

Talk strategy

Do I stop, look, and listen before I speak?

Starter

Students are greeted at the door and handed a piece of paper. On one side of the paper there is the Pastiche Poem written by the facilitator, on the other side of the poem is a word cloud of the students' choice of symbolic language from Lesson 4. Students are invited to listen to the poem and then asked the following group questions:

- Who wrote the poem?
- Where did the author's choice of words come from?
- To what extent is this a voiceprint?
- What is the mood of the poem?
- What is the meaning?
- Is there a message behind the poem?

- Is there such a thing as a single author?
- Can a classroom be a single author?
- Which one of the 'Looky Listeners' does this poem most appeal to?
- Could you use the word cloud for any other activity?

Learning exercises

Students are read their 'Emancipation Proclamation' and ceremoniously given a chance to say goodbye to each of the 'Looky Listener' characters, who they are, where they might be found in society, before they are put back into the box.

Students are given a piece of paper and a pen. They are told that they can keep their Pastiche Poem or recycle it before the end of the lesson. They are invited to use their pen freely and leave their mark on the blank piece of paper. Students are advised that each and every piece of paper will be collected and published anonymously in an Anthology of Voices which will be available in the school library.

Plenary

Facilitator gives thanks and welcomes thanks from the students to each other. Students are invited to write the words 'The End' at the end of their Twine tile, to hyperlink them, and to write a response to the following stems:

- What does this story mean to me?
- What is my lasting impression of these lessons?
- What has this time at school shown me?
- How do I see the classroom?
- How do I see the teacher?
- How do I see myself?
- What am I most proud of doing this term?

Assessment for learning

Facilitator collects the qualitative data from the student evaluations and feedback. Opportunity to deliver their findings to the Head of Department and/or SLT for Teaching and Learning.

EVALUATION

Even at the inception stage of this paper, through discussion with colleagues and line managers, it became immediately clear that a pedagogy of emancipation is intrinsically linked to a pedagogy of discomfort. What seems to be the biggest area of discomfort around this inquiry is the appeal to reform and recast students' perceptions of attainment. Professionally speaking, nobody would look to challenge the perception that creative writing requires creative methods of composition. This is almost tautological. However, professional skirmishes and academic friendly-fire could be felt whenever a creative behavioural strategy or a creative assessment framework was proposed as a negotiated learning path between student and teacher. Perhaps this could be because mainstream schooling conceives of attainment as heavily linked to assessment; furthermore, in the current climate, summative assessment far outweighs formative assessment in the minds and aspirations of young learners. How this happened goes beyond the scope of this paper and my own field of educational experience. But, somewhere along the line the journey has been lost to its destination. A major shortcoming of this paper is a lack of data in respect of this anthropological and educational concern. It is a field of interest, for me, which had personally gone unvoiced until now.

CONCLUSIONS

My belief in a pedagogy of emancipation has never been stronger. My hope is that this paper and my efforts are beneficial to my colleagues and peers. There is much need for further reflexive practice amongst educators, especially those of us who want to celebrate the ever-increasing complexity of human knowledge and the funding of new knowledge for generations to come. It seems poignant to close this paper with the words of Alain Badiou (2009) which remained bright in my mind like a standard on a mainsail:

'This world where I see for myself the fount of happiness my being with someone else brings. 'I love you' becomes: in this world there is the fount you are for my life. In the water from this fount, I see our bliss, yours first.'

TEACHERS AND CREATIVE WRITING: RAHWA WOLDU

INTRODUCTION

In this essay, I will be arguing that teachers can and should use creative writing as part of their professional and personal development. I will first introduce a workshop model of 7 sessions to be facilitated with teachers. This could be either weekly or fortnightly depending on the commitments teachers may have. Activities include starting points and/or model examples. Each of the activities seek to explore some aspect of teacher identity. Following this, I will progress to evidencing why creative writing is important for reflective practice and why teachers are in need of this in light of their roles as educators and the current state of education in the UK. Within this, I will also explore my experience as a current secondary school teacher in London.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

BENEFITS OF CREATIVE WRITING

There is much research on the benefits of creative writing, including the freedom from constraints it provides, and the potential for hidden and unwanted memories to resurface (Bolton, 2011). Whilst writers may not have a clear sense of direction before setting out to write, it is possible that repressed feelings and thoughts can be retrieved (Mills, 2006), (Bolton, 2011), (Elbow, 1998). This process of unearthing and revisiting experiences is central to being a reflective practitioner (Bolton, 2011).

Practitioners such as Bolton (2011) have used writing as a means of exploration with various groups of people including hospital patients and health care professionals. She notes that the benefit of reflective writing is that it helps writers to observe events

more clearly and with closer attention (Bolton, 2011). Similarly, she makes the point that writing can unearth hidden emotions which, if left unexplored, could lead to burnout (Bolton, 2011).

Central to Elbow's (1998) free writing practice is the idea that over time, the writer's perspective will be improved because their innate 'inner critic' is inactive. He notes 'Writing is a setting down of that burden and it lets the mind take a rest from it.' (Elbow, 1998, p.46) Whilst his aim is to improve the quality of writing, his comment here still signals the therapeutic benefit for writers. Celia Hunt (2010) also champions the therapeutic effects of writing fictional autobiography. She too sees writing as a means of relieving the mind in order to develop 'a stronger and more flexible sense of self.' (Hunt, 2010, p. 234)

King, Nielsen and White (2013) confirm Hunt's point of view, exploring how writing therapy benefits mental health patients; they argue that writing allows patients to develop their own alternative narrative to that provided by society (King, Nielsen and White, 2013). In a similar sense, teachers too could benefit from developing their own alternative narrative-free from the expectations of government, media, management, parents and students. During the recent global pandemic, the British media paid specific attention to teaching given the sudden closure of schools. This, in turn, meant that teachers were exposed to widespread surveillance. Headlines such as the following prove this:

'Parents call for pupils to repeat whole year to prevent 'lost generation' or 'cancel summer holidays' as 75% of teachers say their students have fallen behind due to online-learning at home.' (Daily Mail 28 January 2021)

During this time, teacher stress is likely to have risen due to such reports as that above, and the phrase 'lost generation' insinuates impending doom for many children, creating a feeling of hopelessness. Given that such reports were reoccurring, the

means to address this stress was not provided. Creative writing workshops designed to give teachers an outlet, or at the very least free writing prompts, could have been beneficial during this time.

Sophie Nicholls (2009) highlights that writing alone is not entirely beneficial. She explores the benefits of developmental creative writing which progresses beyond the solitary expressive writing model developed by Pennebaker. She notes that developmental creative writing can be led by a facilitator, or counselling can be provided to aid writing (Nicholls, 2009). Her argument is that this provides writers with guidance and a sense of community, which can be necessary particularly when writers may face anxiety or writer's block.

Francis Gilbert (2021) notes that creative writing can be taught or used in a myriad number of ways i.e., for commercial success, as a means of activism, or healing (Gilbert, 2021). I am interested in how creative writing can be used to 'heal' teachers, especially in light of the complex professional setting they find themselves in. Given the nature of creative writing that allows for a release from inhibiting structures and its ability to dig into a deeper consciousness, it seems only right that teachers have the chance to probe their own complex identities, which at times range from mentors to therapists to social workers, and so on.

EDUCATION AND REFORM

The implementation of the UK educational reform has meant that new structures have been put in place including increased monitoring and emphasis on performativity (Ball, 2003), (Skerritt, 2020), (Skinner, Leavey and Rothic 2021). Similarly, the reform of education has also changed the value systems in schools. This, in turn, has led to a transformation in teacher identity (Ball, 2003). With these changes, teacher health and wellbeing has also been impacted.

Griva and Joekes (2003), for example, studied the wellbeing of teachers in the UK and other parts of Europe. They noted that

'the UK teachers were considerably worse off than their European colleagues...work under worse conditions and report lower levels of psychological and physical well-being.' (Griva and Joeques, 2003, p.457) Sources of stress ranged from workload, pupil attitudes and behaviour, lack of promotion, and poor relationships. Griva and Joeques (2003) also highlighted the current state of education is not new but rather a consequence of the recession of the late 1980s.

Similarly, Ball's (2003) research on educational reforms points out that 'policy technologies of education reform are not simply vehicles for the technical and structural change of organizations but are also mechanisms for reforming teachers.' (Ball, 2003, p. 217) Like Griva and Jokes (2003), he also points out that the impact on teachers is caused by increased workload, competitiveness, and surveillance. Both Griva and Joeques (2003) and Ball (2003) point out that values in education have changed from community and care to competitiveness and performativity. This change in values has impacted teacher identity.

Skinner, Leavey and Rothic's (2021) study of UK teachers who experienced work related stress is also relevant here. They explored the impact of educational reforms on teacher identity and morale. Reform in the UK has involved 'a move from a traditional, state-centred, public welfare idea of teaching and learning which has a focus on caring relationships and commitment...to a new postmodern, private sector concept of a corporate teaching and learning context.' (Skinner, Leavey and Rothic's, 2021, p.2) They note that teachers are monitored more closely, both by internal and external measures i.e., league tables and appraisals (Skinner, Leavey and Rothic's, 2021).

Skerritt (2020) echoes their comments here about surveillance, which occurs in a variety of ways, and increased expectations of teachers, including greater transparency of schools to the public. Likewise, he highlights teachers in academies face more surveillance if they are part of a chain school. However, whilst most teachers in his study didn't enjoy the increased levels of performativity and its 'tick box nature,' it is worth noting one of

the participants enjoyed the fact that inspections afforded ‘an opportunity for validation.’ This is important in demonstrating that all teachers may not experience or view change and pressure in the same way.

Kim and Asbury (2020) make the point that teachers have faced further difficulties during the recent COVID-19 global pandemic. They note that increased teacher stress has been a consequence of sudden closure, separation from students, a lack of familiarity with online learning, and a lack of direction from the government (Kim and Asbury, 2020). As a teacher who worked during the pandemic, I can attest to Kim and Asbury’s findings. In addition to this, I would add that working from home was also challenging because of a lack of space, increased amount of screen time and the lack of physical boundaries between home and work. Similarly, working online inevitably increased the surveillance of teachers, as parents, siblings, and other family members were given the ability to be ‘invisible’ while acting out their own critiques and judgements. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the media scrutiny during this time only heightened teacher stress. Despite this, no government initiatives were put in place to support teacher’s well-being. Therefore, it would have been left up to school leaders to act on this. This, of course, would be challenging depending on the resources at hand and finances afforded to schools. In this instance, teachers could have used creative writing as a necessary, and viable outlet.

TEACHERS AS WRITERS

When considering teachers and creative writing, it is worth noting that teachers, especially English teachers, may not be fluent in the practice of creative writing. In her study of teachers as writers, Cremin (2017) notes that English teachers ‘expressed low self-esteem as writers’ (Cremin, 2017, p.2) and felt more inclined to teach the subject due to their love of reading. Another valid point she makes is that teachers may forgo the opportunity to model writing to their students in order to not lose teaching time. For this reason, teachers could choose to pre-write any writing models or use the work of students.

Creative Writing Gets Different

Cremin, Rief (2017), and Martin et al (2021) highlight that when teachers do write alongside their students, it increases the motivation of these pupils. Similarly, Grainger (2005), Rief (2017), and Smith and Wrigley (2012) confirm that teachers who write can better understand their students' experiences. One of the reasons that teachers may not be equipped to model writing is because little time is dedicated to this when they are training to become teachers (Grainger 2005). When writing is used in education, it is to evidence skills rather than to be creative (Mckenzie et al, 2016). Similarly, teachers could fear not completing subject content (Martin et a, 2021).

Creative writer and facilitator Elbaz-Luwisch (2002) emphasises that fiction can help teachers to reflect on their practice by allowing them to dig deeper into their own experiences, feelings and values. Following a writing exercise, her student's reflection highlights the connection between writing and feeling: 'All the feelings come up, a shudder passes through me with the strong feeling that most of what happened in that situation could have been prevented.' (Elbaz-Luwisch, p.411)

Affording teachers this kind of reflexivity through their own writing could enhance their communication skills and could also serve as a healing tool to overcome difficult encounters. What is particularly beneficial about personal narrative is the privacy afforded to writers. Bolton rightly states 'a piece of paper... will never get bored, angry, distressed or shocked.' (Bolton, 2011, p.22).

Writing also gives teachers the chance to adopt multiple voices, and step into some else's shoes (Bolton 2006). This is a key requirement of reflective practice, being able to assess actions, motives, and feelings (Bolton 2006). Creative writing could also afford teachers a vital opportunity to step back from their intense professions and reflect (Martin et al 2021). However, this same opportunity can be a point of difficulty for teachers who are not ready to relinquish control and be vulnerable (Bolton, 2011).

Teacher writing groups, if well established and facilitated, have the potential to provide teachers with a safe space to articulate their experiences. Whilst it remains the discretion of teachers to share their own writing, at the very least teachers can share their experiences, which could prove useful in their own development. Finnish teachers who participated in creative writing workshops noted the benefits: 'There is a sense of belonging, even though I haven't always been eager to share my inner thoughts with the other teachers in the group.' (Martin, Tarnanen and Tynjälä, 2021, p. 9) Smith and Wrigley (2012) also found that teachers benefited from their writing workshops. One of their participants commented: 'I feel much happier after the meetings with a space to think and express myself in writing.' (Smith and Wrigley, 2012, p.79)

WORKSHOP DESIGN

When designing the series of workshops, I had in mind the following statement: 'The workshops combine writing and reflection in a way that is particular to teachers and has the potential to make a significant impact on continuing professional development.' (Smith and Wrigley, 2012, p.73)

Each session consists of a free writing activity and a main task. The short and quick nature of free writing tasks seemed ideal, particularly in light of the fact that teachers may be reluctant to write. Similarly, Elbow (1998) mentions that the exercise disables the natural tendencies for writers to edit their work in favour of releasing the 'burden' in their minds (Elbow, 1998, p. 46). Following each free writing activity, I wanted teachers to have the chance to individually reflect on their writing by addressing the questions provided. This is more of an internal reflection, but participants can also make concrete notes. The questions serve as a guide in place of talk.

Each main activity is linked to some aspect to the teacher's professional identity. The intention is that they can draw on their real-life experiences to produce creative writing using a combination of non-fiction, fictional, and poetic techniques. Again, after each main activity, there is a reflection

Creative Writing Gets Different

which can be completed individually. Following this, there is room for discussion and sharing of work if participants feel confident. Here, the facilitator is to spotlight and make useful connections between participants' comments.

As a facilitator running this group, it would be important to reinforce that participants do not have to share their writing but can share their learning observations, or generic teaching experiences. The principal thing is to make participants feel comfortable and to motivate teachers who may struggle with writing. Similarly, I agree with Nicholls comments that the facilitator 'holds the group, weaving in and around the disparate writings and forming them into a cohesive whole.' (Nicholls, 2009, p.175)

Finally, McKenzie et al (2016) asserts the importance of facilitators knowing their writing groups. Following their own workshop, they realised teachers did not engage with writing due to their own prior understandings of writing (McKenzie et al, 2016). For this reason, the first workshop is dedicated to establishing participants' views towards writing and their own commitments to the workshop. This is in the hope that participants will then be able to share their reservations, or fears, and hopefully through discussion and care, be inspired to build a new relationship to the act of writing.

CONCLUSION

Overall, there is a clear need for teachers to use creative writing as part of their professional development. In light of the demanding workplace that teachers find themselves in and the structural changes which have occurred in teaching, creative writing would prove useful as a therapeutic tool. If left unaddressed, teacher stress could lead to people leaving the profession, as was seen in Skinner, Leavey and Rothic's (2021) study, where teachers felt happier when they had left their schools in the UK.

Aside from teacher stress, being a reflective practitioner as Bolton (2011) suggested is worthwhile in allowing teachers to continue assessing their experiences, feelings, and relationships. This, in turn, would likely improve pedagogy. Similarly, the added benefit for English teachers, such as myself, is that improving our writing skills would benefit our students.

Finally, given the nature of budget cuts in education, creative writing could be an efficient way of providing teachers with Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The workshop design I created could easily be facilitated online via TEAMS, or in person. Similarly, a school blog could also be used, which could further facilitate the workshop and help to reach more teachers. Of course, some boundaries would need to be put in place to avoid the latter platform from becoming a tool to express discontent. I would recommend that an online facilitator still be used to unite participants together.

WORKSHOP DESIGN FOR TEACHERS

INTRODUCTION LESSON

Learning objectives

To introduce writing as a means for exploration and establish a commitment to writing.

Facilitator to introduce goals of the programme, use writing to develop professionally, socially, emotionally, and mentally.

Starter

What is freewriting? According to Peter Elbow, free writing is writing without our 'inner critic' interfering— 'The main thing about freewriting is that it is 'nonediting'...it undoes the ingrained habit of editing at the same time you are trying to produce.' (Elbow, 1998, p.6) The key requirement of free writing is to just keep writing: 'If you can't think of a word or a spelling, just use a squiggle or else write, 'I can't think of it.' Just put down something.' (Elbow, 1998, p.3)

Creative Writing Gets Different

Describe what writing means to you—is it a person, a smell, an event, an object, a weather system, etc. Write for 6 minutes.

Following this free writing activity, spend 5 minutes reading over your piece of writing. What stands out to you? Any keywords? Phrases? Try to summarise the main thought or feeling of your piece. The same reflection questions will be used after each free writing activity in each session.

Main activities

Activity 1: Share one word/phrase possibly from your free write/ reflection to describe writing to you. From this, the group facilitator will try to draw links/ contrasts between participants' experiences.

Activity 2: Participants write 5 commitments that they are going to try and keep over the next 12 weeks. These could be commitments to their own development, to writing, to the group or a combination.

Examples of commitments:

Letting go
Being honest
Giving myself a chance
Hearing other opinions
I will try to share
Not judging myself

SESSION 2: WHO ARE YOU?

Starter

Draw a spider diagram of the various attributes which make up your identity. If you wish, you can draw the various elements of your identity.

Examples: Faith, family, profession, gender, hobbies/ interests, music, etc

Inspiration and Diversity

Choose one thing from your identity list and describe it in as much detail as possible. Think about the sounds, smells, tastes attached to this thing.

Main activities

Describe your identity as a dish of your choice.

Example:

Each layer of my cake is made out of joyful lemon sponge. Any family lumps have been smoothed over, with extra layers of yummy cream cheese-faith. Light sprinkles of music brighten up the surface, along with tried and tested friendships to hold each layer in place. Hidden gems of femininity have been added to prevent undesired rough edges. Strong traces of teaching nuts run throughout. Use your judgement to avoid sections which are unwanted. Cut deep enough, glistening gems of creativity rest within.

Plenary

Read over your assignment and determine what stands out to you. Is this dish well balanced? Are any elements out of proportion? Would you remove or add anything?

SESSION 3: LIFE AS A TEACHER

Starter

Write freely about your feelings towards teaching.

Main activities

Create a recipe poem for a day in your life as a teacher.

Before starting this task, you may want to write a list of things which typically occur in your day or list words which spring to mind when you think of your day. Then, use these words to form a poem. Feel free to play around with the shape of your poem.

Example:

Early
Coffee
Screams
Emails
Meetings
Time
Lessons
Corridors
Toilets
Tired
Correction
Engagement
Laughter
Children
Car Park

Example:

Take a pinch of early mornings
and mix with last night's broken sleep
pour in hot coffee
before oblivious teenagers enter
Into the pressure bowl
of rows broken only by my voice
ding

It's time to break from the whisking of ideas,
cover my container to avoid deflating
handle carefully into the staffroom
avoid contact with other pupils
may contain traces of late homework, or rolled up skirts
that can only be handled on an empty bladder and snacks
ding
remove cover and pour myself into a tray
then into the oven
beads of sticky children stick and
bubble and bake with no windows
smell confrontation burning lower the heat
remove items from the room
including spicy pupils
ding
switch off oven
leave to cool, breathe, consolidate
think about the hole of today
take in air
nourish
before cutting another slice of me
prepare and prep marking to be
Smothered in red pen
once homework is thickly coated,
emails are sent with sprinkles,
to avoid ash in tomorrow's oven
ding, ding, ding.

Plenary

Read over your writing and consider the feeling of the piece, what words and thoughts stand out to you? If you were to rewrite your day, what would it look like? Rewrite the opening 3 sentences if you like.

SESSION 4: POLITICS

Starter

Look at the following headlines and choose one or more to write freely about:

'I will never return to teach in England': UK teachers finding refuge abroad'

'Teachers under pressure: Working harder, but with less control over how they do their jobs'

'Teachers rise to the challenge as Covid-19 workload rockets'

Main activities

In our everyday jobs, much of what we do feels constricted and measured. This partly boils down to the teaching standards we are assessed by.

Look at the following teaching standards:

1. Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge pupils
2. Promote good progress and outcomes by pupils
3. Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge
4. Plan and teach well-structured lessons
5. Adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils
6. Make accurate and productive use of assessment
7. Manage behaviour effectively to ensure a good and safe learning environment
8. Fulfil wider professional responsibilities

Highlight one keyword which piques your interest or moves you and then use it as a stimulus to write creatively in any form you wish (letter, speech/monologue, poem, fiction, etc).

Example of words sampled from standards:

Expectations
Progress
Good
Structured
All
Accurate
Manage
Wider
Conduct

Example of writing from keyword:

Endless expectations sometimes make me feel trapped. It's not that I don't expect good things for myself or want to 'progress,' but when do I get a minute to breathe...If all I ever do is keep trying to attain a good standard. If all I try to do is deliver well planned lessons, think structure, think structure. How am I teaching all kids to be creative and be free when I am more concerned about the accuracy of my lesson and the accuracy of their writing? How is my ability to manage data and results going to benefit my students in any shape or form? When should I care about their wider interests, what brings them joy, what they are naturally gifted at? How can I bring out their gifts and talents which will one day conduct their futures? It's not about me conducting a brilliant lesson, it's about me inspiring young people, making sure they expect greatness from themselves. From deep within, they should want to progress because they have found the good inside. They have managed to unpick the structure within themselves and find all their gifts and talents. Accurately working on these things daily will help to manage their futures. Will give them the scope to go out in the real world and seek wider opportunities and realise it wasn't anyone else that needed to conduct their futures but themselves.

Plenary

What teaching standard would you change if you had the choice and why? What would you replace it with?

SESSION 5: PROGRESS

Starter

What does progress look like to you? Draw progress or describe it in detail.

Main activities

Draw/list your teaching journey as a river. Include any hurdles, bridges, breaks you have made along the way.

Example:

September 2014-2015, working as a teaching assistant—stepping stone.

November 2015-July 2016, working as a teaching assistant at Capital city—small river.

September 2016-2017, PGCE student at Goldsmiths—bridge.

Placement 1 at St James High School—thrown into a river, near drowning.

Placement 2 at Sacred Heart—catching air, meeting Tim, finding my way into a boat, passenger.

September 2017, NQT year—crossing a bridge still at the Sacred Heart, fairly safe territory.

Fully qualified—present in my own boat, steering.

Main activities

Choose one moment from your journey to recreate as a narrative.

Example:

I.e., placement 1 at St James high school – thrown into a river, near drowning – every day felt long and bitter and painful.

I walk up the long street, staring at the lifeless building ahead of me. Tears roll down my face as I dread the thought of entering once again. Reaching the main entrance and the statue Mary offers me no hope. The emptyish car park may provide momentary light, a few moments of solace to myself.

But they are here. Huddled together in the office like a group of cackling birds waiting to snap. I offer a weak smile, and good morning, position my back to them and face a blank screen. Keep still, I tell myself, you'll disappear any minute now. Somehow my back feels vulnerable, I lean forward slightly just in case.

Damian calls us in before I've had enough time. He rambles on about something. Everyone pitches in but nothing sticks, bubbles of coursework, and data travel through my ears. 15 minutes and they are done. I prepare myself for another day as an empty shell, longing to put myself back together again.

Plenary

Read over your account and consider: Is this moment as you remember it? Has anything new resurfaced? Does anything feel distorted or untrue? Does anything still move you emotionally?

SESSION 6: PERSONAL EMOTIONS

Starter

Look at a pack of emojis (each depict an emotion/state of being). Choose one or two as a prompt/s to write freely.

Main activities

Develop a fictional conversation between yourself and the feeling of stress. Choose a format of your choice i.e., script, narrative. Here is an example of my attempt at this activity:

As I lay still in the dark, I know he's there. I can feel his hot breath each time he exhales. I wait before saying something. Hoping he'll just go. I squeeze my toes. Clench my jaw. No use.

'What do you want?' I say.

'That's no way to treat your friend.' He smiles. An ugly toothy smile. He's much shorter this time. His head is bigger than his thin body.

'I stopped being friends with you a long time ago,' I look up and face the ceiling. Hoping he will get the hint. He doesn't and moves closer to my bed. Somehow, I know he's about to stroke my face. His hands are rough like sandpaper.

'But remember, you're the one that let me back this time. Bad day, was it?'

'No,' I hear my own voice begin to crack.

'You can always take the day off tomorrow, stay with me.' He slowly lifts my sheet.

'No, no.' I push him back without turning to face him. I start counting to drown him out.

'1...2...3....'

'Hey, I'm just trying to help. Remember last time when you ran away, that wasn't so bad, no one will mind.'

'I'm stronger now!' I say assertively.

'You need me, remember that, now just lie back down, your head hurts, you've had a hard day, the kids were little buggers, and you need a break.'

'I don't, I don't!' I'm yelling now, and take the plunge. I turn to face him.

I look around but can't hear him. Then, I hear a tap against the window. He waves goodbye and I know I've done it now.

Plenary

Read over your conversation and consider: What is your relationship with stress like? How do you see stress? Is this helpful or unhelpful?

SESSION 7: RELATIONSHIPS

Starter

Through free writing, describe someone you admire.

Main activities

Try to recall a challenging/positive incident you experienced in school. Rewrite this incident from the 1st person perspective of someone else who was involved.

Example: Rewriting challenging incident with pupil

I really wasn't in the mood when I walked into class. I just wanted to go unnoticed. I was p***** off already and to make matters worse, I was on my period.

I can't really remember what was happening around me, I know that Miss was asking for us to be quiet as usual. When she called my name in the register, I said 'here Miss' as usual.

I didn't notice at first until everyone was looking at me. 'Casey.' She said my name again but this time it was different. She was staring at me as if to say I had done something wrong. I didn't want to lose my cool, so I just said 'yea, I'm here.' That's all I said. Then she mumbled something about 'young people having attitudes' and that's when I had to reply, 'I did answer to my name.'

She looked at me again, this time harder, as if she was trying to intimidate me. The whole class was staring. I could feel my cheeks burning. I just wanted the moment to pass but no. Next thing I know she's asked me to leave the room. It's a big drama now.

Creative Writing Gets Different

'Casey what's the matter?' she asks. By this point, I'm just irritated that she's still speaking.

'Miss, you're saying I'm being rude but I did answer to my name,' I say.

'Ok, but what's with the attitude, the eyes rolling, the screw face.' At this point, I want to let her know she's doing the exact same thing. I'm trying to hold myself together, but I know my eyes are filling up. She's still staring at me and then tells me I'm free to use the bathroom. I run off before she can see she's won.

Plenary

Read over your narrative and consider: Is this moment as you remember it? Has anything new resurfaced? Have you learnt something new about how someone else may have experienced this moment? How could you use this understanding going forward?

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Sara Carroll began her working life in publishing, first at the Quaker Home Service, then editing children's books at Walker Books and Random House. In 2004 she trained as a secondary English teacher and believes creative writing plays a vital role in the development of children and teenagers. She recently completed the MA in Creative Writing and Education at Goldsmiths University, writing a pamphlet of poems on the theme of aging for her dissertation.

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