THE MINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER:

A TOOLKIT FOR CREATIVITY AND WELLBEING

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Francis Gilbert

In Memoriam
Zhe Wang

Acknowledgments

Thanks to all the creative writing educators who have helped me during my life and career.

.

Also by Francis Gilbert

I'm A Teacher, Get Me out of Here (2004)
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Yob Nation (2006)
Parent Power (2007)
Working the System (2011)
The Last Day of Term (2012)
How to get a great English Degree (2013)
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Who Do You Love (2017)
The Mindful English Teacher (2017; revised 2025)

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INTRODUCTION: THE JOURNEY BEGINS

You're in a community centre, fluorescent lights humming, chairs scraped into a circle. Around you sit half a dozen older adults—retired teachers, former nurses, grandparents—gathered for your creative writing class. One participant clears their throat. They've written about the day their sibling died. The room goes still. You feel the weight of it—their story, their trust, your responsibility. You wonder: Am I doing this right? Can I hold this space well enough?

Or maybe you're in a secondary school. You've just rushed from break duty. Your Year 10s file in, noisy, distracted. You had a plan—a lesson on character voice—but the projector won't work, someone's in tears, and another has forgotten their book. You feel yourself tensing. The writing won't happen like this, you think. What now?

If either moment feels familiar, this book is for you.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher is not a manual. It's a companion for those teaching creative writing across all contexts: schools, universities, prisons, community centres, libraries, living rooms. It offers a pedagogical stance grounded in presence, care, and intention.

It draws upon the concept of 'thick mindfulness '(McCaw 2020: Gilbert 2024) which views mindfulness not as a set of discrete practices – a bit of meditation, body scans, mindful walking etc – but as an embodied, lived practice in the totality of one's life.

The book invites you to slow down, notice what's happening in your classroom, and listen patiently to your experience and other people's.

This book is structured into six interconnected sections, each offering reflections, case studies, model lessons, poems, and prompts to support your practice.

SECTION 1: LEARNING THEORIES AND PRACTICE

We begin with foundational questions. What does it mean to teach creatively and mindfully? How do students learn best—and what happens when they struggle? Drawing on educational theory, psychology, and classroom experience, this section explores the "learning pit," metacognition, and the role of reflection. It introduces the journal as a space for deep noticing and the teacher's six pedagogical roles—Learner, Healer, Explorer, Vendor, Author, Activist—as lenses for self-inquiry and design.

SECTION 2: SETTING BOUNDARIES, CREATING SAFETY, AND FREEING IMAGINATION FREE

Creativity flourishes when students feel safe—emotionally, physically, and imaginatively. This section explores how to establish mindful boundaries, co-create classroom agreements, and navigate safeguarding with care and clarity. It introduces the "writer's rights," the pedagogy of permission, and multisensory strategies for building a classroom climate where writing becomes possible, even for those who doubt they belong.

SECTION 3: REIMAGINING ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

What happens when feedback energises rather than inhibits? This section unpacks how to design feedback and assessment practices

that promote motivation, trust, and voice. It critiques normative workshop models and offers dialogic alternatives that value process over product. Here, writing is not judged but witnessed—and assessment becomes a conversation, not a verdict.

SECTION 4: DECOLONISING AND DIVERSIFYING THE CREATIVE WRITING CLASSROOM

To teach writing mindfully is to teach with historical and cultural awareness. This section explores storytelling as a decolonial practice, questions dominant canons and workshop norms, and examines the narrative gaze through a critical lens. It centres multilingual, hybrid, and culturally embedded forms of writing—affirming that creative writing is not a Western invention but a global inheritance.

SECTION 5: VOICE, IDENTITY, AND MOTIVATION

Who gets to write? And who is heard? This section explores writing as a practice of becoming. It draws on identity theory, radical YA fiction, and inclusive reading pedagogies to show how writing can support agency, joy, and transformation. Here, students are not just learning to write—they are learning to inhabit their own stories with courage.

SECTION 6: CRAFT, COMMUNITY AND CARE

What does it mean to build a creative writing classroom that nurtures skill without losing soul? This final section examines how to teach technique mindfully, how to create meaningful communities of writers, and how to integrate multimodal, playful, and reflective practices into everyday teaching. We explore diagrarting, soundscapes, drama, and poetic structure—not as formulas, but as invitations.

CONCLUSION: WRITING AS PRESENCE

In the end, this book is about presence. Not the presence of authority, but the presence of attention. When we teach writing with care, when we listen to our students and ourselves, something more than knowledge is passed on. A way of being takes root.

The chapters that follow are not instructions. They are doorways. They invite you to begin again—with breath, with pen, with purpose.

CHAPTER 1: WELCOME TO THE LEARNING PIT

MINDFULNESS, STRUGGLE, AND THE CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER

This book may take you somewhere uncomfortable.

If it's doing its job, it will lead you into the pit—not a place of despair, but of discovery. A space where ideas unravel. Where you may question practices you've long trusted. Where your role as a creative writing teacher might feel, at moments, unsettled.

And that is exactly where we begin.

In this opening chapter, I want to introduce a powerful metaphor for the experience of deep learning and the heart of mindful pedagogy: **the learning pit**. This is the idea that in order to learn anything meaningful, we have to descend into a pit where we experience confusion, where our assumptions/previous practices, are questioned in some way. This process of confusion – what Vygotsky calls 'cognitive dissonance '(Gilbert 2021) – is the bottom of the pit. But with a mindful approach, whereby we acknowledge our discomfort and find strategies for solving that confusion, we are able to climb out of the pit, and, once at the top of it, we discover we have learnt something new.

Developed by James Nottingham (2015), this concept visualises the process of encountering challenge, experiencing cognitive dissonance, and eventually finding one's way forward—not through avoidance, but through reflection and resilience. As I've argued elsewhere (Gilbert, 2021), this is not only a useful model for understanding student learning but also for understanding our own development as teachers, writers, and human beings.

MINDFULNESS AND DIFFICULTY

We must begin by dispelling a common myth: mindfulness is not the same as meditation. It doesn't require sitting cross-legged in silence or retreating to a monastery—though those practices have their place. More significantly, mindfulness is a **practical, moment-to-moment awareness** that can be cultivated in everyday life—in classrooms, conversations, even chaos.

Traditionally, mindfulness is defined as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). This might sound gentle, but it is often demanding. In the context of creative writing and teaching, mindfulness is not about striving for calm or covering over discomfort with positive thinking. It means sitting with, at times, difficulty: acknowledging and accepting discomfort, resistance, or failure with curiosity and compassion. The overall approach is positive in that it sees all experience as a form of learning.

Crucially, mindfulness invites us to meet the moment as it is, not as we wish it were. It asks us to attend to what's actually happening in the classroom—within our students, and within ourselves. And it reminds us that kindness isn't weakness. It is a courageous, radical stance. Especially when things are messy. Especially when we're not sure what to do.

The **Mindful Creative Writing Teacher** acknowledges uncertainty and emotion as central to the creative process. They do not flinch when students say, "I hate what I've written." They breathe into it. They say, "Good. You're in the pit. Let's stay here a moment and see what's waiting for us." The **Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher**, by contrast, either rescues too quickly or dismisses discomfort altogether. "Just move on," they say. "Follow the plan."

But there is no plan that can substitute for the experience of **being stuck**—and finding a way through.

THE LEARNING PIT IN PRACTICE

The learning pit is not merely conceptual. It is lived. In creative writing education, students fall into it when:

- They abandon a piece that felt safe but superficial
- They receive challenging, honest feedback
- They take on a new form and discover they are not yet fluent
- They realise their work is full of cliché, and don't yet know what to do about it

And we, as teachers, fall into it when:

- A strategy we've used for years no longer works
- A student challenges our authority or perspective

- Our own writing dries up, and we don't know how to respond

Falling into the pit is not failure. It is the first step towards transformation. Nottingham (2015) reminds us that learners must struggle productively in order to build understanding. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher doesn't avoid the pit. They name it. They honour it. They teach from within it.

GROWTH, EMOTION, AND STORY

In my 2021 article for *Writing in Education*, I described how I used storytelling—and puppets!—to help teachers understand this metaphor. I told the story of my "inner princess", desperate for perfection, falling into the pit and meeting the demon of doubt. In the end, it was not a magic solution that saved her, but the process of staying in the pit long enough to discover her own way out.

This is not silliness. This is pedagogy. As Glonek and King (2014) point out, storytelling helps learners retain meaning and connect disparate experiences. The learning pit is not only a metaphor—it is a narrative structure. And teaching, like writing, is a story we live through.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher uses stories to help learners reflect. They might say: "Where are you in your writing journey today? Are you on the cliff edge? Halfway down? Beginning to climb?" This framing empowers students to own their process, not merely perform competence.

EMOTIONAL LITERACY AND REFLECTION

Teaching and learning are emotional experiences. We ignore this at our peril. Through reflective journalling (Bolton, 2006), we can begin to chart the emotional terrain of the learning pit. As teachers, we can become more responsive—less reactive—and help students understand that their frustration is not a signal to stop, but a sign that learning is taking place.

This book will not give you a script for teaching creative writing. It will not offer quick fixes or tidy solutions. Instead, it will guide you into deeper engagement—with your students, your practice, and

your own inner writer. It will ask you to be present, to be brave, and to trust the process.

The pit is waiting. Let's go in together.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM: THE DESCENT

You fall,
not by accident,
but because you dared to reach.
It is dark here—
but not silent.
The echo is your voice,
returning changed.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- What is your relationship with difficulty in your own writing life? How do you respond when things aren't working?
- When was the last time you felt like you were in the learning pit as a teacher? What helped you climb out?
- How might you normalise the learning pit in your classroom? What metaphors, models, or stories could you use?

WRITING AND TEACHING PROMPTS

- Write about a moment when you wanted to give up as a teacher or writer—and didn't. What shifted?
- Create a visual metaphor for your version of the learning pit. What creatures, weather, or landmarks live there?
- Try beginning your next class with: "Today we're going into the pit. Let's notice what it feels like." Debrief after the session using a reflection circle or journal entry.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

- How does your institution reward or punish learning that happens through struggle?
- What practices could you develop to better support students who are stuck—without 'fixing 'the work for them?

- How might journalling or metaphor help your students understand their own learning processes?

MINDFUL PROMPT

Take a breath before your next class and ask yourself:
What if this moment of confusion is the best teaching opportunity I'll have today?
Then step into the pit—and listen.

CHAPTER 2: BEING PRESENT

THE CREATIVE REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

POEM: THE WINDOW WATCHES

The window in my classroom watches
me pace the front like I know the way.
It sees the boy who speaks in fragments,
the girl who edits her name.
It watches me ask a question
no one wants to answer—
and sees the answers anyway
in shifting shoulders, tilted heads.
The window does not applaud my good lesson.
It doesn't wince when I fumble.
It just sees
me
as part of the story,
not the whole of it.

This chapter invites you to begin a creative reflective journal—not simply as a diary or a record of progress, but as a living document of your experience as a writer and teacher of writing. In doing so, you'll begin to explore two key capacities essential to mindful practice: **reflection** and **reflexivity**.

To be *reflective* is to look inward—to examine your thoughts, feelings, experiences, and development over time. This includes asking: *What do I notice about my teaching? What am I learning about myself as a writer? When do I feel most uncertain or most alive in the classroom?*

To be *reflexive* goes further. It involves looking outward, or even sideways: questioning how your perspective is shaped by your position, and how others might see you. It's writing about your classroom not just from your own view, but from that of a student, a colleague, or—as in the poem above—even the furniture or architecture around you. It opens space for decentring, humility, and imaginative empathy.

Together, these modes of writing form the foundation of a creative reflective journal. And crucially, the **Mindful Creative Writing Teacher** keeps such a journal not only to track their writing life but to deepen their understanding of what it means to teach—and to learn from—creative writing.

THE UNMINDFUL AND MINDFUL TEACHER

The **Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher** begins with a PowerPoint. A list of learning objectives glows on the board: "By the end of this session, you will be able to identify narrative structure, apply characterisation techniques…" Students follow, but no one is truly present. The activity is completed, but the writing feels detached.

The **Mindful Creative Writing Teacher** begins with an invitation. "What are you carrying with you today?" they ask. Not metaphorically, but literally—an object, an image, a thought. The lesson unfolds from there: through connection, attention, and play.

The Unmindful Teacher treats journalling, if at all, as a formality—focused on evaluation or record-keeping. The Mindful Teacher writes reflectively and reflexively, modelling this practice as a way to be both present and porous. They might write an unsent letter to a silent student. Or describe their classroom from the perspective of the clock. Or reflect that a class "felt like a train running ahead of me—I was a passenger, not the driver."

This writing is not judged. It is not graded. It is a practice of presence.

STRATEGIES FOR CREATIVE REFLECTIVE JOURNALLING

Drawing on Gillie Bolton (2011), here are some approaches the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher might use or invite students to try:

1. **Free-flow Writing** – Write without stopping or editing to bypass your inner critic.
2. **Reminiscence** – Describe a formative memory, lesson, or teaching moment.

3. **Metaphor and Symbol** – Express experiences as images: your teaching as a weather pattern, a jammed drawer, a messy allotment.
4. **Unsent Letters** – Write to a student, a colleague, a version of yourself—real or imagined.
5. **Dialogues with the Self** – Let different parts of your teaching identity speak to each other.
6. **Fictional Fragments** – Invent a brief story that captures a teaching dynamic indirectly.
7. **Cathartic Writing** – Let strong emotions onto the page in raw, uncensored form.

WRITING THE SELF TO TEACH WITH PRESENCE

Mindfulness is not a tool. It is a way of being—with students, with writing, with ourselves. As C.T. McCaw (2020) suggests, "thick" mindfulness is relational, ethical, embodied. It asks not only *what* we are doing, but *how* we are being.

Start where you are. Begin your own journal. Give it a name. Let it become a co-traveller in your teaching and writing journey. Sometimes I share my own entries—not to impress, but to model vulnerability. Like this poem, written beside a list of student names:

POEM: THE NOTEBOOK

It sits on the desk like a second skin,
creased at the spine, ink-blushed and smudged,
its corners curled like a fox's ears—alert
to every story not yet told.
Inside, the quiet scratch of breath
becomes a lesson plan,
a question,
a line:
"What if your favourite object could speak?"
Today it held a poem shaped like a paperclip,
a confession folded into a memory,
a map of a boy's imaginary world
where trees spoke Latin and dogs recited Auden.
I carry it home.

Its weight is nothing.
Its weight is everything.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- What kind of teacher are you becoming? How do you know?
- When do you feel most present in your teaching? Most distant?
- What metaphors might describe your relationship with writing—or your students?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Free-write for five minutes without stopping.
- Write a letter to your future self as a creative writing teacher.
- Create a dialogue between your confident and uncertain teaching voices.

TEACHING ACTIVITIES

- Begin your next session with: "What object are you carrying—physically or emotionally?"
- Ask students to describe their week as a landscape, or their writing voice as a type of weather.
- Invite students to keep their own creative reflective journals—and write alongside them.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Before your next class or writing session, pause and ask:
What energy am I bringing into the room? What story am I carrying? What silence might I need to listen to?
Let your journal become the place where you begin to find out.

SECTION 1: LEARNING THEORIES AND PRACTICE

This section explores how people learn to write creatively—and how teachers can support that learning with mindful, research-informed strategies. It introduces foundational concepts like the learning pit, metacognition, reflective journalling, and pedagogical stance. The goal here is to help you see your teaching not just as delivery, but as co-discovery.

CHAPTER 3: LEARNING THAT STICKS

CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT AND MEMORABLE TEACHING

OPENING NARRATIVE: THE TEACHER I STILL HEAR

It wasn't what she said. It was how she waited.

When I asked, "Can this be a poem if it doesn't rhyme?" she looked up from the circle of chairs and said, "Read it aloud and let us decide together." It wasn't praise that made her memorable. It was the space she gave for thought.

We didn't write to perform, or to impress. We wrote to understand.

Years later, I realise that everything in that classroom was aligned: the intentions, the activities, the responses. There was a kind of invisible architecture to the learning. It didn't feel like a lesson. It felt like discovery.

LEARNING TO TEACH, TEACHING TO LEARN

Teachers often plan lessons around content. *What am I teaching today? What activity will we do?* But effective teaching—especially in creative writing—requires a different sequence of thought: *What do I want my students to learn? How will I know they've learned it? How can I help them get there?*

This is the principle of **constructive alignment**. Coined by John Biggs (2003), the idea is simple but powerful: learning objectives, teaching activities, and assessments must be explicitly connected. Students learn best when they understand what they're meant to learn, when the teaching methods support that learning, and when the outcomes they're assessed on reflect the objectives they've been aiming towards.

Creative writing classrooms often resist standardisation, but constructive alignment is not about making writing mechanical—it's about making learning visible, purposeful, and meaningful.

CASE STUDY 1: THE UNMINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – R.K.

R.K. teaches an introductory creative writing class in a large college. His aim is to help students "get words on the page" and "build discipline." His lessons often begin with generic prompts: *Write about a time you were scared.* Then students write silently for 30 minutes.

There is no clear objective beyond the act of writing. When students ask what they're meant to learn, R.K. replies, "Just trust the process."

Although some students flourish in this free space, others flounder. One student struggles with structure. Another wants to explore form but feels unsure if that's allowed. R.K. doesn't use reflection or feedback to track learning. There's no sense of progress—only repetition.

Despite his best intentions, R.K.'s lessons lack alignment. There is activity, but no aim. Students write—but they do not always grow.

CASE STUDY 2: THE MINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – N.A.

N.A. teaches creative writing to Year 8s in a diverse secondary school. Today's objective is visible on the board: *To explore how description can build atmosphere.*

N.A. begins by inviting students to recall a place they felt unsettled or safe. They read a short extract from *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman and discuss how sensory language creates mood. Then students write descriptions using one of three stimulus images.

Throughout, N.A. uses a model text, questions for peer feedback, and a reflection journal: *What mood were you trying to create? What techniques did you use?*

The assessment task matches the objective: write a short descriptive piece that builds atmosphere. Students know what they're aiming for, and how to improve.

There is a scaffold—but also choice. There is reflection—and movement. There is, above all, alignment. Students leave not just

with a paragraph, but with a sense of *how* writing works and *how they ve grown*.

PRITCHARD'S LEARNING CHECKLIST: A CREATIVE WRITING PERSPECTIVE

In *Ways of Learning* (2006), Alan Pritchard outlines a checklist for lesson planning that foregrounds key aspects of effective learning. Each item can be powerfully adapted for the creative writing classroom:

Is there a clear focus, with explicit learning objectives?
Mindful teachers state the aim. "Today we're exploring voice," not "Just write something."

Is the content based on the students 'existing knowledge?
Good creative writing starts with what students know—language, memories, rhythm, heritage.

Is the lesson set in an appropriate context?
Real-world themes, emotional truths, relevant texts and genres root the work in meaning.

Is there scope for social interaction and for activity?
Writing can be shared, shaped in pairs, performed aloud, even co-authored.

Is there variety and choice in approaches and responses?
Poems, microfiction, diaries, comics. Choice fuels engagement.

Are 'brain-friendly 'conditions in place?
Calm spaces, sensory prompts, flexible postures, movement breaks—all help.

Is the lesson planned to move learning forward?
Every writing task should be part of a bigger learning journey, with clear feedback loops.

REMEMBERING OUR BEST TEACHERS

Think back. Who do you remember teaching you—not just content, but confidence?

Perhaps it was someone who asked you to write a monologue in the voice of a bin. Or someone who let you rewrite a myth as a text message thread. Maybe they didn't teach creative writing at all—but they taught you that your voice had value.

Chances are, these teachers weren't just charismatic. Their lessons made *sense*. Their aims, their methods, and their assessments were aligned. They taught not just what they knew—but how you could learn.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher does not fear structure. They understand that structure, thoughtfully designed, offers freedom—not limits. Through constructive alignment, their lessons become more than just busy sessions—they become *coherent experiences of discovery*.

They know that when teaching makes sense, so does writing. And that's when students begin to write what they didn't yet know they had to say.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

NARRATIVE PROMPT: THE LESSON THAT WORKED

Think back to a lesson—one you taught, or one you experienced—that *just worked*. You remember the energy, the clarity, the sense of flow. Now ask yourself:

What was the objective?
What did you actually do?
What did you learn?
Were those three things aligned?

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- How do you currently plan creative writing lessons? Do you start with activities, or with learning goals?
- Do your students understand what they are supposed to be learning—and why it matters?
- Can you identify a lesson where activity and outcome felt disconnected? What might alignment have looked like?
- When have you taught a lesson that felt memorable or meaningful? What made it work?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Write a reflection on a teacher who helped you grow as a writer. What did they do that aligned learning, method, and outcome?
- Imagine a creative writing class where the goal is emotional truth, but the assessment is a tidy short story. Write about the tension.
- Draft a short scene in which a student misunderstands a writing task, and the teacher uses alignment to help them reframe their goal.
- Begin with: *What I wanted them to learn was...* and follow the thought to its natural (or unexpected) conclusion.

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- Read through Pritchard's checklist. Which items do you already embed in your teaching? Which need more attention?
- Debate: Does constructive alignment limit creative freedom—or enable it?
- Discuss the role of clarity in creative work. Is transparency about learning objectives empowering, or prescriptive?
- Share a lesson plan and analyse it with peers using the principles of constructive alignment. What do you learn?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Choose one upcoming creative writing lesson. Identify the learning objective, the planned activities, and the assessment task. Check: are they constructively aligned?
- Create a "learning ladder" for a short unit: each lesson builds toward a bigger aim. Share this scaffold with students.
- Trial Pritchard's checklist as a planning tool for a week. At the end, reflect: Did it shift anything? Did your students respond differently?
- Invite students to co-create success criteria for a task based on the day's objective. See how it changes their writing.

A MINDFUL PROMPT

Before your next class, pause. Ask: What is the one thing I most want them to take away from this lesson? Then ask: Have I made that learnable?

CHAPTER 4: DESIGNING FOR DISCOVERY

HOW THE MINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER CRAFTS MEANINGFUL LESSONS

"The best writing lessons aren't just about what gets written. They're about what gets discovered—by the student, and the teacher."

INTRODUCTION: A LESSON THAT OPENED THE DOOR

In a cramped classroom after school, a teacher handed out postcards. Each one bore a painting—some surreal, some stark. "Choose one," she said, "and imagine who painted it. Why?" There were no rules. No objectives. No expectations. But by the end of the hour, a girl who had never shared before stood up to read about a ghost trapped in a doorway. The teacher said only, "Thank you for letting us in."

Years later, I still think of that moment. It wasn't the activity itself that mattered—but the way the teacher designed space for something meaningful to unfold.

This chapter explores how the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher designs such lessons: not by accident, but with intention. Using a framework inspired by the CASTERS model (Gilbert, 2025), we contrast this with the practices of the Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher, who may plan with good intentions, but little alignment.

TWO TEACHERS, TWO DESIGNS

THE UNMINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – MR. S.

Mr. S. prides himself on variety. One week it's horror writing. Next week, it's script. Then slam poetry. He opens most lessons with "Today we're doing X," followed by a flurry of rules: Don't use adverbs. Avoid weather openings. Show, don't tell.

The pace is fast. Students write in silence, then hand in work for marks. Some are confused: "What are we supposed to be learning?" Mr. S. shrugs: "That's writing for you. You either have it or you don't."

There's plenty of activity. But little direction. The feedback is general. Reflection is rare. And students leave with pages—but not always with insight.

THE MINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – MS. D.

Ms. D. begins her Year 9 lesson by writing a question on the board: *How can small details create big feelings?*

She plays a soundscape of city rain, then asks students to freewrite: "Describe a moment you remember in the rain—not the whole story, just what you saw or felt." She shares a model paragraph from Ocean Vuong and invites students to identify what makes it powerful.

Next, students build their own pieces, with optional scaffolds for structure or sensory language. They share in pairs, offering "emotion echoes"—a word that stayed with them. Reflection journals follow: *What did you learn about writing emotion through detail?*

By the end, students not only have vivid writing—but a deeper sense of craft and confidence.

TWO TEACHERS, TWO LESSONS

CASE STUDY: THE UNMINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – MR. A.

Mr. A. begins his lesson with: "You've got thirty minutes to write a short story." No context, no prompt. Students fumble for ideas.

A worksheet follows: "Use at least one simile and a flashback." Feedback is reduced to ticks and generic comments. Some students finish quickly, others stare into space. The goal? "To get it done."

Reflection is absent. Connection is minimal. Students leave with words on a page—but little sense of why they matter.

Case Study: The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher – Mx. K.

Mx. K. begins with a gentle pause. "Let's take a moment. What's one sound you remember from this morning?" Students share quietly. The class reads a short piece by Warsan Shire. Then comes a prompt: "Describe a place that no longer exists—not factually, but how it felt."

Writing begins with stillness. Sharing happens in pairs, followed by journalling: "What surprised you in your writing?"

Later, Mx. K. sets an invitation: "If you'd like, edit this piece at home and bring it back. Let's see where it wants to go."

Students leave with words, yes—but also with presence, purpose, and pride.

THE CASTERS FRAMEWORK

CASTERS is an acronym and a philosophy. It stands for:

- Connect
- Activate prior knowledge and assess
- Set goals and learning activities
- Timings
- Effort focus
- Reflect
- Set independent learning

Let's explore each stage, contrasting mindful and unmindful teaching through classroom moments, pedagogy, and poetic insight.

C IS TO CONNECT

To welcome each student, to call them by name...

The Mindful Teacher begins by building the relational ground. This might mean asking "What are you bringing with you today?", using a poem, a soundscape, or a shared object to spark emotional resonance.

The Unmindful Teacher skips straight to task. Students are treated as blank slates, the room quiet but emotionally cold.

Mindful Practice:
Connection is not an icebreaker—it is a condition for creativity.

A IS TO ACTIVATE AND ASSESS

We assess what they know, not to test or confine,
But to honour their path and spark the next line.

The Mindful Teacher invites students to bring prior knowledge into the room: "What do you already know about this genre?" "What memories or feelings might we write from today?"

This is formative, not performative. It helps the teacher see what's needed—and shows students their voices are valid.

The Unmindful Teacher assumes students know nothing, or worse, that everyone starts the same.

Mindful Practice:
Learning begins with recognition, not erasure.

S IS TO SET GOALS AND ACTIVITIES

We frame our intentions, map out the way...

Clear, open goals guide the Mindful Teacher. A lesson might aim "to explore voice through sound," or "to build atmosphere using metaphor." Activities are selected purposefully—aligned with goals, responsive to students.

The Unmindful Teacher may plan disconnected tasks, or use vague aims like "write a good story." Confusion and disconnection follow.

Mindful Practice:
Goal-setting is not about control. It's about intention and invitation.

T IS FOR TIMINGS

A rhythm, a beat to hold focus near...

Time is not a straitjacket. The Mindful Teacher uses gentle timing cues: a five-minute freewrite, a ten-minute drafting stretch, a pause for reflection.

The Unmindful Teacher over-plans or under-prepares. Time is either chaotic or oppressive.

Mindful Practice:
Timing scaffolds freedom. Flow needs a frame.

E IS EFFORT FOCUS

We praise the persistence, not just the speed...

The Mindful Teacher celebrates the messy middle. "You stayed with that difficult feeling—well done." "This metaphor took work—you kept going."

The Unmindful Teacher praises polish and speed. "Great ending!" "You're a natural!"

This builds fixed mindsets—and leaves less fluent writers feeling invisible.

Mindful Practice:
Effort is the art. Writing is courage, not just competence.

R IS TO REFLECT

Through sharing and silence, we circle back round...

The Mindful Teacher asks: "What did you learn about yourself in this piece?" "Where did you get stuck?" Reflection happens aloud, in journals, or even through gesture.

The Unmindful Teacher skips reflection—or makes it a tick-box task. "Write one thing you learned."

Mindful Practice:
Reflection isn't afterthought—it is integration.

S IS TO SET INDEPENDENT LEARNING

To journal, to edit, to write beyond class...

Independent learning doesn't mean "homework." It's an invitation to continue the journey. A prompt to explore. A nudge to keep going.

The Mindful Teacher offers options: journalling, editing, reading, rest. The goal is self-trust.

The Unmindful Teacher assigns uniform tasks, disconnected from the lesson. "Write 500 words for next week."

Mindful Practice:
We teach students to keep writing when no one's watching.

CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT AND THE CASTERS FLOW

CASTERS supports constructive alignment (Biggs, 2003). Each element works together—goals, tasks, feedback, and reflection all supporting the same purpose.

Take this sequence on voice:

- Connect: Students share an object that reminds them of home.
- Activate: Discuss voices in poems by Grace Nichols and Raymond Antrobus.
- Set Goal: "To develop a character voice rooted in place."
- Timings: 5-minute brainstorm, 15-minute freewrite, 10-minute share.
- Effort Focus: Praise specificity and persistence.
- Reflect: "What surprised you about this voice?"
- Set Independent Learning: "Write a letter from your character's perspective."

The sequence is fluid but coherent. It builds from connection to independence. Learning sticks—not through pressure, but through presence.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM: CASTING THE SPELLS

We are the casters of stories and spells,
Shaping young minds where imagination dwells.
With every lesson, we plant the seed,
Of voice, of purpose, of powerful need.

C is to **Connect**, to forge the flame,
To welcome each student, to call them by name.

With warmth in our gaze and kindness our guide,
We build the trust where bold words can reside.

A is to **Activate**, draw from the well,
Of memories, senses, the stories they tell.
We assess what they know, not to test or confine,
But to honour their path and spark the next line.

S is to **Set goals**, to name what we seek,
A scene, a character, a voice that will speak.
We frame our intentions, map out the way,
Through prompts and through purpose, we shape the day.

T is for **Timings**, not rigid, but clear—
A rhythm, a beat, to hold focus near.
With space to be playful and time to refine,
We honour the craft in each student's line.

E is **Effort focus**, the heart of our creed,
We praise the persistence, not just the speed.
For writing is messy, a wrestling art,
And grit is the ink that flows from the heart.

R is to **Reflect**, to pause and to see,
What moved us, surprised us, what we came to be.
Through sharing and silence, we circle back round,
And in that deep stillness, new truths are found.

S is for **Set independent learning** anew,
To carry the spark and see it shine through.
To journal, to edit, to write beyond class—
A future where self-trust will always amass.

- So let us be **CASTERS**, lighting the page,
  Guiding each student from margin to stage.
  With stories as anchors, with questions as keys,
  We teach them to write, to imagine, to *be*.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- Where in your current lessons do students feel most connected? Most confused?
- Which CASTERS elements do you use instinctively? Which do you skip?
- How might CASTERS help you design more coherent, reflective lessons?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Write from the line: "A lesson that walked away with me was..."
- Draft your next lesson as a poem. What feelings do you want to spark?
- Imagine a student years from now. What might they remember—not what you taught, but how they felt?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Choose a lesson you've taught recently. Analyse it using CASTERS. Where is the alignment strong? Where might it deepen?
- Redesign a standard writing task using the CASTERS flow.
- Build a lesson-planning template with each CASTERS stage as a prompt.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Before your next class, pause. Ask:
What kind of fire am I lighting today—and how will I help it carry on burning after they leave?

Then breathe. And cast.

Francis Gilbert

CHAPTER 5: WHY TEACH CREATIVE WRITING?

ROLES, REASONS, AND REFLECTIONS

POEM: ODE TO THE BROKEN TEACUP

O broken rim, O lip-shard kiss,
you spill your heat like truth—
sudden, bare, unapologetic.
I nearly threw you out.
But now I sip slowly,
and think of holding what's imperfect.

A teacher begins with instructions: "Write a story about a haunted house. Use at least one simile. Include a flashback." One student freezes, writing "I don't know what to write" over and over. Another begins a story about a mute girl in a locked room. Later, their work is marked for grammar and structure. No one comments on the silence, or the courage.

In another room, a teacher invites stillness. "Write about a place that no longer exists," they say. A student writes about a river that was paved over. Another about the cupboard where she used to hide. They're not asked to perform. Just to begin. They share. A voice trembles. Someone nods. The teacher listens. Not everything is said, but something real has begun.

These aren't caricatures—they're true to life. Many of us have taught as both teachers, sometimes within the same hour. What distinguishes the **Mindful Creative Writing Teacher** is not expertise or eloquence, but **intention**. They ask: *Why am I doing this? What matters now, here, with these people?*

PEDAGOGICAL IDENTITIES OF THE CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER

In my article *Why Teach Creative Writing?* (2021), I propose six overlapping roles that Creative Writing teachers may adopt—consciously or unconsciously. These identities are not fixed

personas, but **lenses** through which we might view our teaching. Each one reflects a distinct set of values, methods, and challenges. The **Mindful Creative Writing Teacher** moves between them attentively, choosing the stance that best serves the students, the space, and the moment.

THE LEARNER

The Learner teaches from a stance of humility and openness. They understand that creative writing is not a subject to be mastered and dispensed, but a practice to be shared. The Learner models curiosity, makes mistakes publicly, and values student insight as much as their own. They often co-write with students, or use freewriting as a way to think alongside them. Their classroom is dialogic, emergent, and reflective.

The Learner is not afraid to say, "I don't know—let's find out together." This can be unsettling in a system that values expertise and control. But it allows the teacher to remain present, porous, and attuned to the unpredictable journey of writing.

Risk: Uncertainty may be misread as a lack of authority.
Strength: Builds trust, encourages independence, affirms that learning never ends.

THE HEALER

The Healer teaches from a place of care. They recognise that writing often draws on vulnerable experiences, and that the classroom must feel emotionally safe for expression to occur. The Healer may use journalling, trauma-informed prompts, or guided meditation to help students access difficult material gently. They are attuned to tone, body language, and silence.

The Healer offers feedback that affirms without patronising. They listen with their whole self. They know that for some students, simply being heard is transformative.

Risk: May over-function emotionally, or avoid challenge in favour of comfort.
Strength: Builds trust, allows for depth, supports healing through language.

THE EXPLORER

The Explorer treats creative writing as a mode of inquiry. They delight in crossing disciplinary boundaries—encouraging students to write poems based on scientific phenomena, stories inspired by historical research, or dialogues with philosophical ideas. For the Explorer, writing is a way to **know differently**.

They invite play, experimentation, and intellectual risk. Their prompts often begin with "What if?" or "Suppose…" They see curiosity as more important than correctness.

Risk: May sacrifice cohesion or clarity for novelty. Strength: Invites discovery, deepens engagement, expands what writing can do.

THE VENDOR

The Vendor teaches with clarity, precision, and purpose. They offer structures, models, and practical tools for students to sharpen their technique. They may use acronyms, sentence stems, or feedback rubrics. They often emphasise audience awareness, marketability, or the transferable skills of writing.

This is the teacher who ensures that students leave with something **usable**. They prepare learners for assessment, submission, or public performance.

Risk: May over-prescribe or prioritise product over process. Strength: Supports technical development, demystifies success, builds confidence.

THE AUTHOR

The Author is often rooted in the literary tradition. They bring a deep love of language, form, and voice. They may model writing that draws on their own creative practice, or introduce students to canonical and contemporary texts with reverence and rigour.

The Author values precision and style. They encourage students to read widely, imitate wisely, and revise persistently. They treat writing as a craft to be honed.

Risk: May privilege literary forms or norms that not all students feel ownership of.

Strength: Builds depth, fosters ambition, connects students to wider writing cultures.

THE ACTIVIST

The Activist teaches with purpose. They understand creative writing as a site of cultural critique and transformation. The Activist brings in texts and voices from the margins, challenges dominant narratives, and asks students to write not just about the world—but **into** it.

They might use spoken word, manifesto writing, or narrative resistance. They create space for stories that challenge injustice and imagine alternatives.

Risk: May inadvertently place pressure on students to perform trauma or identity.
Strength: Empowers students, engages with real-world issues, affirms voice as agency.

FIVE QUESTIONS FOR PRESENCE

These five pedagogical questions are not just planning tools. They're practices of mindfulness:

Why am I teaching?
To offer permission? To model process? To heal? To agitate? To honour beauty? There is no one answer. The question itself is the point.

Who am I teaching?
Not just by age or ability—but hopes, fears, silences, stories. The mindful teacher plans not for a demographic, but for a living community.

What am I teaching?
Form and technique, yes—but also voice, trust, curiosity, resilience.

Where am I teaching?
In a community hall, a prison classroom, a kitchen table? Context shapes content. Presence means attending to place.

How will I teach?
Through co-writing? Prompting? Freewriting? Modelling failure? How speaks your pedagogy?

Lesson plans that emerge from these questions feel different. They honour silence. They leave space. They invite surprise. They begin in empathy.

FREE WRITING AND PERMISSION TO BEGIN

As Peter Elbow reminds us, writing begins with flow, not polish. With presence, not perfection. He invites us to "write first, clean later"—to think with the pen, to welcome the mess.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher often begins with small, intimate texts—poems, fragments, models of vulnerability:

The River Listens

The river says nothing
and still I tell her everything.
She watched my mother drop her ring
in the reeds.
She swallowed my shout,
when I kicked the bottle,
when I wanted my father to come back
and he didn't.
The river holds it all,
as if I were worth remembering.

Ode to the Small Act

O you, who held the lift door open,
when I dropped my keys and couldn't smile properly,
O you, who refilled the kettle and said nothing—
you are not on TV,
you will never trend,
but you made the day kinder
by a few invisible degrees.
O you,
unnoticed,
remembered.

These poems don't teach form. They model **permission**. They say: You can write about that. You can write about anything.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- Why do I teach creative writing? What calls me to it?
- Which roles (learner, healer, vendor, etc.) do I inhabit? Which do I avoid?
- What kind of experience do I want to offer my students—and how do I plan for that?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Freewrite: "I teach creative writing because…"
- Write a letter to yourself five years ago—or five years ahead—about your teaching.
- Design a session as a poem or story. What emotional journey will it invite?

TEACHING ACTIVITIES

- Draw your teaching identity wheel. Mark where you tend to teach from—and where you'd like to visit more often.
- Use "The River Listens" as a prompt: what natural space or force has carried your story?
- Ask students to write odes to overlooked things or people—then write your own.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Before your next session, pause and ask: **Who am I teaching from today—and what matters most in this room?**
Let that shape what happens next.

CHAPTER 6: MINDFULLY UNDERSTANDING WRITING PEDAGOGY

The page as teacher

Write not to show but to know.
Begin not with plan but with pen.
The question comes after the scrawl,
a shape you didn't see until it formed.
You are the cartographer and the land—
ink as contour, thought as terrain.
There is no outside authority here,
only the rhythm of the hand,
the breath behind it,
the quiet voice saying: this is the way.

Writing, when approached mindfully, is not merely a means of expression or craft. It is also a method of learning. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher understands that writing itself teaches: it draws the learner into presence, inquiry, and self-direction. Through the act of writing, students discover not just what they think, but how they think. They make sense of their emotions, intuitions, and intentions. In doing so, they begin to design their own learning.

This is more than a philosophical stance; it is grounded in well-established educational theory. Chris Watkins (2011) outlines three broad modes of learning: learning by being taught, learning through individual sense-making, and learning by doing things with others. While all three approaches have their place, it is the second—learning through individual reflection and meaning-making—that resonates most deeply with mindful writing pedagogy. Here, learning becomes not something that is done to students, but something they do for themselves.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher actively nurtures this capacity in their students. They design lessons in which writing is both the process and the product of learning. They invite learners to set their own goals, reflect on their own progress, and use writing to clarify their thinking. This might involve journalling, uncensored freewriting, or open-ended creative tasks that allow for emotional

exploration as well as technical development. What matters is not that the writing is correct, or even complete, but that it leads the writer somewhere they haven't been before.

This approach contrasts with the methods of the Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher, who may rely heavily on being the expert in the room—delivering knowledge through lecture, prescribing exercises with tightly defined outcomes, and evaluating success according to fixed rubrics. In such classrooms, students can feel adrift or constrained. They may struggle to connect the activity with their own creative purposes. There is often little time for reflection, and writing becomes a task to be completed rather than an experience to be inhabited.

By contrast, in the classroom of the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher, writing becomes a way of slowing down, noticing, and being with oneself. The teacher trusts the process of writing to teach what needs to be taught. They do not assume that the learning will be immediate or even visible. But they create the conditions -- spaciousness, permission, attentiveness -- in which deep learning can occur.

One of the simplest and most powerful tools in this process is freewriting.

Freewriting is the practice of writing continuously, without stopping, censoring, or editing, for a set period of time—often just three to five minutes. It's a deceptively simple technique that invites the writer to put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) and write whatever comes to mind, even if what comes is nonsense, repetition, uncertainty, or phrases like "I don't know what to write." The only rule is to keep writing, no matter what.

At its core, freewriting is an exercise in permission. It grants the writer freedom from the inner critic, from grammatical expectations, from audience awareness, and from the pressure to produce something polished. In doing so, it often clears the mental clutter that can block creativity and gives voice to deeper, more intuitive thoughts. Many students find that surprising insights or vivid phrases emerge only once they've written past their initial hesitation or resistance.

As Peter Elbow (1973: 1998), one of the earliest educational advocates of freewriting, wrote, "The consequence of forcing yourself to write without stopping is that you learn to stop worrying about whether you are writing well and simply begin to write." When used mindfully, freewriting helps writers tune in to their present experience—emotions, images, questions—and to notice patterns in their thinking. It can be used to generate ideas, explore difficult feelings, warm up before a longer piece, or reflect on a learning experience.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher uses freewriting not just as a task, but as a practice—repeated, returned to, deepened over time. They understand that it creates a safe and open space for students to begin. They might begin a session with a freewrite on a single word, an image, or no prompt at all. They do not insist on sharing the results, but invite students to notice what comes up. Sometimes, a student's best line of a poem or idea for a story is buried in the middle of a freewrite, unearthed later in a moment of rereading.

In this way, freewriting becomes both a pedagogical and a psychological tool. It helps students locate their own voice, learn to trust their instincts, and develop a practice of responding—not reacting—to the thoughts and impulses that pass through their minds. It is writing as mindfulness in action.

As I noted in *The Creative Writing Teacher s Toolkit* (Gilbert, 2017), freewriting is a flexible, accessible technique that allows students to generate material quickly and without judgement. It often reveals surprising connections or phrases that can be developed later. But more than this, it models an attitude of curiosity and self-trust. When students freewrite, they are not writing to meet a standard or to impress—they are writing to listen to themselves.

In the years since writing that article, I've come to see freewriting not only as a useful warm-up or source of ideas, but as a core pedagogical act. It embodies many of the principles of mindful teaching: openness, presence, non-judgement, and trust in the learner. It can be adapted for reflection, feedback, exploration, or simply as a way of arriving in the room. It is, in many ways, the

simplest gesture of allowing—and allowing, as a mindful concept, is at the heart of creative practice.

Allowing means letting go of perfectionism. It means making space for ambiguity and doubt. It means noticing rather than controlling. It means creating a classroom in which students can write before they know what they want to say, read before they understand, speak before they are sure. It means helping students respond, not react—to the world, to themselves, to the texts they encounter.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher is not afraid of silence, slowness, or difficulty. They know that the best learning often arises from tension, from uncertainty, from questions that have no immediate answers. They structure sessions not around content coverage but around inquiry. They reflect on their own habits and assumptions, and model this reflection for students. They hold space, and they let go.

To support the development of this kind of teaching, the following reflective activities **may** be useful:

- Begin each session with freewriting—no prompt, no expectation, just five minutes of flow.
- Invite students to write about their writing: what they're discovering, what's difficult, what excites them.
- Encourage the setting of personal writing intentions at the start of a project or session.
- Build in time for collaborative writing, but allow space for solitude and privacy too.
- Avoid over-explaining forms and techniques; let students play with them first.
- Use writing as a way to explore learning itself—e.g., "What have I learned through this piece?"
- Replace some evaluations with reflective letters or process notes.

- End each session with a short writing moment: "What stayed with you?" "What question are you leaving with?"
- Keep your own reflective teaching journal, noticing what you are learning as you teach.

Writing teaches. When approached with mindfulness, it teaches deeply, quietly, and lastingly. It helps students become not just better writers, but more attentive learners—of language, of self, and of the world.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES: WRITING TEACHES

POEM: THE FIRST DRAFT LEARNS ME

I did not know I knew this—
the sentence showed me.
It stumbled out, misshapen, wrong,
but carried something true.
A fragment, maybe—
a rhythm in the breath I didn't plan,
a phrase that turned back to look at me.
Learning arrived not as answer but echo,
not as logic but leap.
The page was not the record of knowledge,
it was the way through fog.
And in that fog, a path made of ink,
a question shaped by the asking,
a mind making itself as it moved.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

Before you begin designing, take time to write your way into understanding:

- Who do you want to teach? This could be a real or imagined group—adults, teenagers, children, beginners, returning writers.

- Why them? What do you hope they'll gain through writing? What kind of space do you want to offer them?
- What have been the most powerful learning moments in your own creative life? How were they taught—or how did you teach yourself?

Freewrite on these questions. Set a timer for seven minutes. Don't stop. Let your thoughts lead you into focus.

WRITING PROMPTS

Now begin shaping your ideas into a short scheme of learning—two to four sessions you could deliver or adapt for your chosen group. Use writing as a planning tool at every stage:

- Write a freewrite from the perspective of a participant in your course. What are they hoping for? What might worry them?
- Design an opening session that begins with freewriting. What will the prompt be? How will you frame the activity? What do you hope the freewrite reveals or begins?
- Choose one point in your scheme where you will deliberately *not* teach a concept directly, but create space for students to discover it through writing or discussion. Write out how this might work.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

If working with peers, try these activities in small groups:

- Present your chosen audience and a short description of your proposed course. Ask your group what this group might *need* in terms of encouragement, safety, challenge, and form.
- Exchange first drafts of your session plans and offer feedback using these mindful prompts:

- What is being *allowed* here?
- What kind of learning is being encouraged—being taught, self-discovery, or collaboration?
- Where might something unexpected emerge?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Commit to completing your scheme of learning, however rough. As you do, keep the following actions in mind:

- Begin each session design with a purpose written as a *learning intention*, not a performance goal (e.g. "To explore how poetic form can emerge through play").
- Build in at least one reflective activity per session, using writing as the mode of review.
- Choose one concept (e.g. narrative voice, metaphor, dialogue, setting) and design an *inductive* exercise: one that invites students to experience and observe it before naming or analysing it.
- End your scheme with a form of sharing that supports process rather than product: anonymous fragments, peer letters, group collages, or collective readings.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Writing doesn't just happen in classrooms—it *creates* the classroom. What kind of space do you want your writing activities to build?

CHAPTER 7: DRAMA AS PEDAGOGY — LEARNING THROUGH BEING

In a sunlit classroom in a struggling coastal school, a group of Year 6 pupils stand frozen. One has her arms outstretched in protest; another crouches, hiding behind an invisible curtain. They are in role, mid-scene, wrestling with a scenario of forced relocation. The teacher, seated quietly to one side, is not giving instructions. She is watching, waiting, attuned. This is not chaos. This is co-creation.

This kind of drama-in-education owes much to the pioneering work of Dorothy Heathcote. In their article, Amanda Kipling and Anna Hickey-Moody argue that Heathcote's practice offers not simply a technique but a **pedagogy of resistance**. Heathcote challenged the idea of the teacher as a dispenser of knowledge. Instead, she became a co-inquirer, a presence within the learning space who created the frame but resisted taking centre stage. Her method de-centred authority, prioritised embodied knowledge, and placed drama itself—rather than the teacher—at the heart of learning.

The **Mindful Creative Writing Teacher** draws directly from this philosophy. Rather than positioning themselves as the master of the craft, they enter the writing classroom in role—as a fellow writer, a provocateur, a questioner, a participant. They resist the urge to control outcomes. Instead, they shape the conditions in which discovery becomes possible.

The **Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher**, by contrast, tends to over-determine. They dictate genre, impose form, and expect predictable responses. They may assign 'creative 'tasks, but the outcomes are often pre-scripted or shaped by rigid criteria. The effect is stifling. Students learn to comply rather than to imagine.

Heathcote's approach, as Kipling and Hickey-Moody describe, is embodied in the 1971 BBC documentary *Three Looms Waiting*. In one segment, Heathcote sits on the floor with boys from a residential care home, asking what kind of play they'd like to make. "A prisoner of war story," one boy suggests. Heathcote immediately recognises the metaphorical resonance. These boys, held in a secure institution, are choosing to explore captivity on their own terms. She joins them

in role as an officer—not to control the narrative, but to guide its unfolding. Later, she steps out of role entirely, allowing the boys to navigate dilemmas independently.

This is not performance. It is learning through being. And it is deeply transferable to creative writing.

WRITING IN ROLE, TEACHING IN ROLE

Drama invites immersion. When learners enter role—inhabiting a character, a point of view, or even a symbol—they begin to write from within, not about. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher uses this technique deliberately. They may say, "Imagine you're the neighbour watching the events of this story unfold—write your account," or "Step into the role of an object: what does the storm feel like from the perspective of the broken window?"

In doing so, they encourage students to explore empathy, complexity, and voice. They de-centre themselves, sometimes writing alongside students or facilitating drama to generate material. This is particularly powerful for students who struggle with abstract prompts or those whose literacy confidence is fragile. Being in role can liberate language.

The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher may regard drama as disruptive or childish. They prefer seated silence, neatly filled exercise books. They rarely model writing themselves, and if role-play occurs, it's likely confined to scripted performance rather than inquiry. In their classroom, creative writing remains a school subject—not a mode of investigation.

DRAMA AS FRAME, NOT DECORATION

Heathcote's key insight was that **drama is not simply a method—it is a pedagogy**. It doesn't decorate the lesson; it *is* the lesson. Likewise, creative writing is not just an outcome to be measured, but a **way of knowing**. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher frames learning through the writing itself. They use narrative to ask: What do we not yet know? What are we willing to find out?

In the second classroom scene described by Kipling and Hickey-Moody, a primary class devises a play based on the story of Ahab

and the displaced villagers. There is no fixed script. Roles are fluid. Children engage with socio-political issues, wrestling with injustice through improvisation. Heathcote is nowhere in the performance. She had offered the frame, then stepped back.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher does the same. They may introduce a story seed—"You've just arrived in a town where no one remembers anything"—and then watch as students build the world. They circulate not as adjudicator but as fellow witness, occasionally posing questions in role or reflecting with the group. Over time, the writing becomes self-directed, owned by its makers.

The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher struggles to relinquish control. They may offer a model paragraph and expect replication. "Good writing" is defined by adherence to features. They assess too early, and too often, snuffing out experimentation before it has time to breathe.

RESISTANCE AND RECLAMATION

At its core, Heathcote's work resists the **banking model** of education, which Paulo Freire critiques (2014), where knowledge is deposited into passive students. Instead, learning is relational, embodied, and radically open. It happens through doing, through risk, and often through discomfort. For the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher, this is not threatening—it's the point.

By reclaiming drama as a serious pedagogic force, and placing it alongside creative writing, we open new pathways into thought, empathy, and transformation. Heathcote's methods were revolutionary in their time. They remain so now, especially in a policy climate that values outcomes over process, and compliance over curiosity.

In the end, Heathcote taught not how to act, but how to listen, how to risk, how to *be*. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher carries this legacy—not just in what they teach, but in how they teach it.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM: IN ROLE

I took off my name
and slipped into someone else's shoes.
They were cracked, dusty, far too big—
but they made me walk
differently.
And when I returned
I had questions
I'd never asked in my own skin.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- How comfortable are you with using drama techniques in your teaching? Where does your resistance lie, if at all?
- Think about your own experiences of being taught. Were you ever invited to *become* a character, a moment, or a question? What effect did it have?
- How might the idea of the teacher as "co-discoverer" shift your approach to planning a writing session?
- What might it mean to let "the drama carry the teaching and learning", as Kipling and Hickey-Moody suggest? Does this apply equally to writing?

WRITING PROMPTS AND DRAMA-IN-ROLE ACTIVITIES

- Write from the perspective of an object in your classroom. What does it see, hear, and feel during the day?
- Begin a session with a drama warm-up: "You are walking into a place you've never been before. What do you notice? What's the first thing you say?" Then write in character for ten minutes.
- Use *Teacher in Role* during feedback: adopt the voice of a literary agent, a fellow character, or a reader from another time period responding to a student's piece.
- Offer students a provocation: "You've just been elected leader of a place with one law—what is it?" Allow them to

devise a drama around it, and then write from within the world they've made.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

- In what ways can creative writing benefit from drama's emphasis on presence, role, and conflict?
- How might drama be particularly powerful for reluctant or disenfranchised writers?
- Can writing itself be considered a form of dramatic performance? How might this change the way we assess it?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Watch *Three Looms Waiting* (Smedley, 1971) and make observational notes on Heathcote's role in the room. How does she balance presence and withdrawal?
- In your CRJ (Creative Reflective Journal), reflect on a recent moment where you felt the urge to control a writing task. What would Heathcote have done?
- Try designing a short unit where the learning is framed entirely through a fictional scenario or roleplay. Include moments for writing, reflection, and sharing.
- Create a "teacher-in-role" persona that you can use to provoke discussion: a detective, a journalist, a witness. Use this to help students engage with point of view and tone.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Before your next writing session, stand still and ask yourself: **Am I leading from the front, or stepping into the space beside them?**
Then begin—not with a script, but with an invitation.

CHAPTER 8: DRAMA TECHNIQUES AND THE WRITING MOMENT

The fictional world is alive. A boy has stepped into the centre of the classroom, a paper badge on his chest marked "Detective Inspector". Around him, classmates shout questions. They are not acting; they are *being*. The scene is tense, dynamic—and out of it, stories, letters, and witness statements will soon emerge. No one has yet mentioned 'writing time', but already pens twitch.

This is the power of drama—not as a warm-up or an icebreaker, but as a catalyst for writing that is alive, urgent, and owned by the writer. The **Mindful Creative Writing Teacher** understands this instinctively. They recognise that writing does not always arise from a pre-planned text type or a neat sequence of mini-lessons. Instead, writing often *erupts* from within experience—particularly imagined, embodied experience. This is what Teresa Cremin, Kathy Goouch, Louise Blakemore, Emma Goff and Roger Macdonald (2006) describe as a "seize the moment" approach.

In contrast to writing schemes which carefully scaffold a specific genre, this approach places drama at the centre, allowing the writing to emerge naturally. It trusts the moment, the energy in the room, and the belief generated through fiction. It assumes, crucially, that the writing will come—if the students have something to say.

SEIZING THE MOMENT TO WRITE

Cremin et al. (2006) observed that when teachers privileged drama over predetermined literacy outcomes, pupils wrote more freely, and in forms of their choosing—maps, newspaper articles, notes, scripts, letters. Writing became "a vital and connected part of the imagined experience" (p. 266). Rather than writing about the drama, students wrote from within it. They inhabited stance and scenario (Bruner, 1984), using the voices and convictions generated through drama to create powerful, personal work.

The **Mindful Creative Writing Teacher** embraces this approach. They do not worry if the class doesn't write for the first 40 minutes. They are watching for the moment—the shift in energy, the build-up of tension—when writing becomes inevitable. The

Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher, by contrast, clings tightly to the plan. Writing begins when the lesson plan says it should. The result is often forced, disengaged, or simply formulaic.

Below are a series of **drama techniques** the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher might use to stimulate story, poetry, scripts, or multimodal forms of creative response.

PRACTICAL DRAMA TECHNIQUES TO STIMULATE WRITING

ROLE PLAY

The most familiar technique—stepping into the shoes of a character. Writers engage in dialogue, conflict, or reflection from a point of view other than their own. It allows for discovery and spontaneity. Writing may emerge as interior monologue, letters, diary entries, or scripts.

Mindful Use: The teacher encourages improvisation, providing loose prompts and giving space to explore. **Unmindful Use:** Role play is scripted, rehearsed, or used only as a tokenistic prelude to the 'real work 'of writing.

TEACHER IN ROLE

The teacher participates in the drama, not as director but as co-actor, modelling uncertainty and inviting collaboration. Their presence helps structure the experience without closing it down.

Mindful Use: The teacher uses their role to raise stakes or shift perspective, e.g. entering as a journalist demanding a statement. **Unmindful Use:** The teacher performs but doesn't listen, or dominates the narrative.

HOTSEATING

A character (played by a student or the teacher) is interviewed by the group. This builds depth, backstory, and complexity. It prompts high levels of empathy and engagement.

Mindful Use: Used spontaneously when curiosity is piqued—e.g. "Let's find out what the guard saw." **Unmindful Use:** Rigidly structured, with pre-set questions that flatten curiosity.

ROLE ON THE WALL

A visual strategy: an outline of a character is drawn. Inside the outline go thoughts, feelings, motivations. Outside go context, pressures, relationships. This helps writers map characters deeply.

Mindful Use: Students add to the wall over time, revisiting and revising as the story evolves. **Unmindful Use:** Treated as a one-off task, unrelated to the final writing.

THOUGHT TUNNELS

Students form two lines. One student walks through the tunnel, hearing whispered thoughts from either side. This evokes inner conflict, societal pressures, or emotional dilemmas.

Mindful Use: Used just before a decision point—"Should she run or stay?"—to stimulate urgent, voice-driven writing. **Unmindful Use:** Used as spectacle, without linking it to character or plot development.

SOUNDSCAPES

A group builds a scene using only sound: rustling leaves, dripping water, approaching footsteps. This sensory layering evokes setting and mood, often leading to richly descriptive writing.

Mindful Use: Writers immediately sketch the moment they've just imagined through sound. **Unmindful Use:** Treated as a performance task, disconnected from the writing process.

SIMULATIONS

Extended scenarios where learners are part of an unfolding narrative—e.g. passengers aboard a sinking ship, villagers facing eviction. These immersive events create stakes and urgency.

Mindful Use: Writing arises *within* the moment: SOS messages, protest signs, journal entries. **Unmindful Use:** Simulations are over-directed, leaving little room for invention or response.

WRITING FROM WITHIN

The key across all these techniques is that **writing arises from inside the experience**, not in response to it. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher watches for moments of tension, clarity, or emotional truth—those flashes when students are fully inside the world—and seizes them. "Now," they might say, "write."

What follows may be scrappy, immediate, imperfect. But it will be true. Students will write with conviction. They will write because they *have* to, not because they are told to.

The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher waits until after the drama ends. They separate the writing from the living. "Now that we've done the activity," they say, "let's write about it." But the moment has passed.

WRITING AS IMMERSION

Cremin et al. (2006) conclude that drama does more than provide content for writing. It helps students "enrich their own voices with the words and actions of others" (p. 287). This is true at every level, from primary pupils to adult learners. When writers enter fictional worlds deeply, when they carry conviction and clarity of stance, their writing carries *heat*.

For the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher, this is the goal—not to generate perfect paragraphs, but to enable writing that flows from belief, discovery, and risk.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM: WHEN THE CURTAIN ISN'T REAL

The lights didn't go down.
There was no script.
Just a question,
a moment,
and the sound of breath holding.
And then the words came—
not lines to be remembered
but lives
to be written.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- Have you ever paused a drama activity and instinctively asked your students to write? What happened?
- Which drama techniques do you already use? Which feel unfamiliar or outside your comfort zone?
- When have you missed a writing moment in your teaching—when energy was high but the plan pulled you back?
- What conditions do you need to feel brave enough to abandon a plan and seize the moment?

WRITING AND DRAMA PROMPTS

- Use **Role on the Wall**: Choose a character you're developing. Draw their outline. Inside: thoughts, fears, contradictions. Outside: pressures, past, relationships. Then write a monologue or letter from their point of view.
- Create a **Soundscape** with a group around a single image—e.g., "a town waking up after a storm." Then write the first paragraph of a story set in that place.
- Run a short **Thought Tunnel** based on a dilemma: "You've been given a letter with news that could change everything—do you open it?" Write the character's internal response after walking through.
- After a **Simulation**, give no instructions. Just pause, hand out paper, and say: "What do you need to write, right now?" Let them decide the form.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

- What are the risks and rewards of giving up planned writing structures in favour of spontaneous, drama-led writing?
- How does drama shift the way students view themselves as writers and storytellers?
- What might a creative writing curriculum look like if it were shaped around drama, rather than the other way round?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Identify one point in your upcoming teaching where you might replace a formal writing task with an impromptu writing moment rooted in drama. Trial it and journal the outcome.
- Co-plan a session with a drama colleague, or try out one of these strategies in a peer group—then discuss how the writing changed.
- Start a *Writing from Within* wall in your classroom or teaching journal. Pin up spontaneous pieces that came from drama. Use them as anchor points for reflection.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Before a writing session, try this:
Where will the drama lead us—and what will we write when we get there?
Let the moment be the method.

CHAPTER 9: FROM RULES TO FLOW

MINDFUL PRESENCE IN THE CREATIVE WRITING CLASSROOM

Start where the water stirs—
a trickle of thought, uncertain,
not yet speech,
not yet form—
but already moving.
Let go the dam of doubt.
Let the current carry you
to the stones you didn't know
were waiting.
This is not a test.
This is the river
learning your name.

Writing is often imagined as a process of mastery: of taming unruly thoughts, of conquering language, of producing something polished. But for the mindful creative writing teacher, the process begins somewhere else entirely—not with mastery, but with *presence*. Presence with the breath, the body, the page, and the self. Presence with uncertainty. Presence with flow.

Flow, as described by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2008), is a deeply immersive state of consciousness marked by focus, absorption, and intrinsic motivation. In creative writing, flow is not a luxury—it is a pedagogical foundation. And yet, many writing classrooms begin from a very different place. The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher often starts with rules, rubrics, and rigid expectations. Writing becomes a performance governed by correction. Students are encouraged to internalize a checklist of "do's and don'ts" before they've even begun to find their voice.

A typical lesson might begin with a list: "Avoid adverbs. Don't start with weather. Show, don't tell. Use active verbs. Write what you know." There is often a sense of urgency, of narrowing the field, of forcing work into a predefined shape. Students are encouraged to emulate professional models without first accessing their own emotional landscape. Feedback comes quickly and is often rooted in

critique—sentences are dissected for faults before they are allowed to breathe.

In contrast, the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher begins from a place of spaciousness. There is time to breathe. Time to arrive. Time to notice what arises in the quiet. Lessons often begin not with a rule but with an invitation: a short grounding meditation, a body scan, or a simple freewrite with the instruction to "write whatever wants to come." These teachers understand that writing emerges not just from the intellect, but from the whole being. The focus is not on eliminating error but on cultivating awareness—of emotion, sensation, rhythm, image, and memory. In this way, the writing becomes a site of exploration rather than execution.

Take, for instance, the beginning of a writing session. An Unmindful Teacher may distribute a worksheet and begin with a warning: "Today, we'll be writing character descriptions. Remember to avoid cliché and passive voice." Students quickly scan for traps and try to guess what the teacher wants. Their writing becomes tentative, performative. But the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher might begin the same session with a breath-based grounding exercise, followed by a prompt: "Think of someone who surprised you. Don't name them. Just describe them using your senses. Let the words arrive as they wish." This small shift—from prescription to presence—alters the entire classroom atmosphere. Students are invited to connect, not conform.

Mindful writing pedagogy draws on the work of scholars like Ladson-Billings (1995) and hooks (2008), who advocate for liberatory education that centres student voice and lived experience. It aligns with the embodied teaching practices explored by Siegel (2010), who links reflection and attunement with emotional and cognitive development. Mindful Creative Writing Teachers recognize that flow cannot be forced—it must be invited through the careful curation of time, space, and trust.

Freewriting, as described by Peter Elbow (1973: 1998), becomes a central practice for the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher—not because it bypasses the rigour of craft, but because it activates the *conditions* under which meaningful writing happens. A form of "low-stakes" writing, freewriting involves setting a timer, typically

for five, ten, or fifteen minutes, and writing continuously without stopping, censoring, or planning. If the writer runs out of things to say, they are encouraged to repeat a word or phrase ("I don't know what to write, I don't know what to write…") until the next thought emerges. The constraint is not the *content*, but the *technique*: keep the hand moving, let the words come, don't edit or evaluate.

Far from being aimless or merely therapeutic, freewriting is one of the most effective ways to improve one's writing—particularly when practiced regularly. It helps writers overcome self-censorship, develop fluency, and access surprising ideas and images that might never have emerged through planning alone. Crucially, it helps writers build a trust in their own language—not a perfect, polished voice, but a *living* one.

One student, given the prompt "Begin with the word river," wrote:

River is the word, river is where it starts, river not a real river but the idea of one, I saw one once or thought I did, it was grey and slow and something floated past, maybe a branch maybe a body, no that s too much, but it s what came, river river river, I am still writing, I am not stopping, I am somewhere now.

What matters in this example is not polish but presence. The student has entered the writing with their full attention and allowed language to unfold. The writing becomes a space of exploration, and the constraint—a set time, uninterrupted writing—becomes the boundary within which freedom is possible.

Mindful teachers return to freewriting often, not as warm-up or filler, but as a form of reflective inquiry. These sessions are frequently followed by open-ended questions like: "What surprised you?" or "Where did the writing resist you?" Such questions guide students into greater self-awareness—not just of their writing, but of their habits of mind. In this way, freewriting is both a technical and emotional practice, offering writers a reliable pathway into flow.

In this context, rules and techniques still have a place, but they are introduced *after* presence has been established. They emerge from within the writing process itself, not as obstacles to its beginning. A student might ask: "Why does this sentence feel flat?" and the teacher, rather than offering a correction, might respond,

"Let's slow down and read it aloud. What do you hear?" This shift—from correction to curiosity—is a hallmark of mindful pedagogy.

Moreover, mindfulness practices help students develop resilience and emotional regulation. The writing process is full of vulnerability: doubt, resistance, frustration. Mindful teachers do not protect students from these feelings; instead, they offer tools to navigate them. A pause to notice the breath. A journal prompt to name what's present. A compassionate reframe of "writer's block" as a moment of transition rather than failure. These practices cultivate not just better writers, but more self-aware human beings.

In the end, the goal of mindful creative writing teaching is not to produce perfect stories but to support students in becoming more fully themselves on the page. It is a process of unfolding, of attending, of allowing. It requires that we, as teachers, relinquish our grip on outcomes and trust the process we invite others into.

As this chapter closes, we return to the image with which it began—the river. It is not a metaphor for ease or lack of effort, but for presence in motion. The river is not free because it is unbound—it is free because it flows within a relationship to its environment. So too with writing: we are shaped, but we move. We listen. We respond. We begin.

The writer is water
shaped by the bed
but always moving.
A pause is a pool,
still but not stagnant,
waiting for wind or weight
to ripple the skin.
Write not to control
but to flow—
and in flowing,
find form.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

THEMED POEM

Write not to impress,
but to enter.
The door is ajar,
the breath is enough,
and the words will come
when you stop chasing them.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

What "rules" have governed your own writing or teaching? How do they shape the way you begin?

When in your life have you experienced a sense of creative flow? What conditions allowed it?

How does your classroom environment invite or inhibit flow?

Can you recall a lesson or writing moment where presence mattered more than perfection?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Freewrite on the phrase: *"I am writing because…"*
- Describe a time you wrote something without knowing why. What did it reveal?
- Begin with: *"When I stop trying to write well…"* and continue for 10 minutes.

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- In pairs, share freewrites and identify surprising moments.
- As a group, reflect on: What is the difference between writing *correctly* and writing *authentically*?
- Debate: "Creativity thrives in freedom, not in rules." Agree or disagree?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Begin your next three lessons with five-minute freewrites—no instructions other than "keep writing."
- Reflect on your students 'responses: Do they shift in tone, confidence, or surprise?
- Replace a correction session with a "what's alive in the writing?" session—ask students to find one part of their work that *feels true*.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Pause for one minute. Breathe in. Breathe out.
Ask yourself: *What am I resisting right now in my writing or teaching?*
Let that be the start of your next paragraph.

CHAPTER 10: THE ROOTS AND RATIONALE OF FREEWRITING

Presence, Practice, and Possibility

Writing is an act of presence—but also of permission. For many students, the greatest obstacle to writing is not vocabulary or structure, but fear: the fear of sounding foolish, of being judged, of not knowing what to say. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher recognises that before any craft can be taught, a space must be created in which the unconscious is welcome to speak. One of the most enduring and powerful ways of cultivating this space is freewriting—a practice with deep historical roots in psychology, mysticism, education, and the avant-garde arts (Reynolds, 1984; Brande, 1981; Elbow, 1998).

And yet, like any classroom tool, freewriting can be used mindfully or unmindfully. The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher introduces it casually, perhaps perfunctorily: "We'll do a quick freewrite while I sort the projector." Students are told to write for ten minutes, but there's no guidance on how or why. The teacher does not read what's produced, nor invite students to reflect on it. The result is often a room full of half-hearted scribbling—writing that, though mechanically generated, never reaches beneath the surface.

By contrast, the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher treats freewriting as a doorway into the deeper self. They might begin with a moment of stillness, a grounding breath, and an invitation: "We're going to freewrite for ten minutes. It doesn't have to make sense. Just let the words come. Keep your pen moving. If you get stuck, repeat a word until something shifts. The goal is not to control the writing, but to notice what appears." Afterward, the teacher asks questions that encourage awareness: "What surprised you? What stayed with you? Is there an image, a voice, a tension worth returning to?" The practice is not a warm-up but a way of listening—both to the language and to the self.

The lineage of freewriting extends beyond pedagogy into the mystical and psychological realms. In the early twentieth century, automatic writing fascinated artists and seekers alike. Surrealists

such as André Breton viewed "automatism" as a revolutionary act: a method of accessing the unconscious directly, bypassing reason and aesthetic judgement. Drawing from Freud's model of free association, they believed that the unfiltered flow of words could reveal truths concealed by logic. Artists like Salvador Dalí, Robert Desnos, and Philippe Soupault filled pages with uncontrolled thought in pursuit of emotional and psychic authenticity (Montagu 2002). The goal was to expose hidden desires, contradictions, and images—to allow the unconscious to speak through the pen, just as it might in a dream or a therapeutic session (Jung, 1997).

This notion of writing as a means of surfacing the unconscious also shaped the work of Dorothea Brande. In her book *Becoming a Writer*, she advocated for daily, timed, spontaneous writing as a method of "hitching the unconscious mind to the writing arm" (Brande, 1981). She understood that every writer is divided: part artist, part editor; part child, part judge. Freewriting was her way of strengthening the intuitive voice and breaking through creative paralysis. It was later picked up and popularised by Ken Macrorie (1994) and Peter Elbow, who embedded it within process-oriented writing pedagogy. For Elbow, freewriting was not a sideline but a cornerstone. "The most effective way I know to improve your writing is to do freewriting exercises regularly," he declared. "Don't stop for anything. Don't correct. Don't even think. Just keep going" (Elbow, 1972: 1998, p. 3).

The constraint—timed, continuous, unedited—becomes a paradoxical liberation. It is this constraint that enables flow. Students no longer need to ask whether their writing is good, only whether it is present. The process itself becomes a practice of mindfulness: a focused, non-judgemental awareness of thought in motion. Freewriting trains the writer to stay with discomfort, uncertainty, even nonsense, until something meaningful emerges. As in psychoanalytic free association, it is not the initial expression that matters most, but what follows—what slips out unbidden, and what surfaces when we listen back (Jung, 1997; Purrington, 2020).

In this way, the freewrite becomes not only a generative act, but a reflective one. The mindful teacher encourages students to read their writing as they might analyse a dream: searching for

unexpected patterns, resonant images, buried truths. A student might freewrite:

The hands are still shaking, not sure why, maybe it s not even mine. I keep seeing the red door and I don t know what s behind it but I keep going back there, maybe I ll open it next time, maybe not yet, maybe it s not time.

Rather than analysing the sentence for grammar or flow, the mindful teacher might simply say: "Let's sit with that red door a moment. Where does it lead?" The writing becomes a beginning, not an end.

Freewriting, then, is a form of psychic excavation. It is neither frivolous nor chaotic. It is a disciplined attentiveness to what lies beneath the polished thought. It teaches students not just how to write, but how to meet themselves in language—raw, partial, and real. It resists the perfectionism that often silences young writers and replaces it with a mindful curiosity.

When approached with care and presence, freewriting becomes more than an exercise. It becomes a practice of truth-telling, a ritual of discovery, and a doorway into the soul of the writing self.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

THEMED POEM

The ink flows faster
when you get out of the way.
Let the river speak.
Let the page receive.
Let the shadow tell its tale.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. What are your associations with the unconscious in the creative process?
2. Have you experienced moments in writing where something surfaced unexpectedly? What did you do with it?

3. Do you believe students should reflect on their freewrites? Why or why not?
4. How do you differentiate between "just writing" and writing *mindfully*?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Freewrite starting with: *"I didn't know I knew this but…"*
- Imagine a character or image that repeatedly recurs in your writing. Address it in a letter.
- Write without stopping for 7 minutes on the prompt: *"What lies beneath?"*

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- Share insights from your freewriting. What emotions or ideas emerged?
- Discuss the history of freewriting—how does knowing its origins shape your approach?
- Explore the overlap between dreamwork, psychoanalysis, and creative writing: Where do they converge?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Try "reading the freewrite like a dream"—circle key images, metaphors, and contradictions.
- Create a regular schedule for reflective reading of students ' freewrites (not for grading, but for attention).
- Introduce students to Surrealist techniques: try collaborative "exquisite corpse" exercises or automatic drawing with writing.

MINDFUL PROMPT

After your next freewrite, don't analyse or edit.
Instead, close your eyes and *feel* what the writing stirred.
Then ask: *What wants to be heard more deeply?*

CHAPTER 11: DRAWING THE MIND

Mindful Approaches to Diagrarting and Visual Learning

Not everything starts with a word.
Sometimes it begins with a mark.
A looping scribble, a tangled shape,
a door drawn sideways,
a body made of lines.
Sometimes the hand knows
before the voice does.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher does not separate writing from the body, the senses, or the multiple forms of expression that human beings have used for millennia. In their classroom, writing is not confined to lined paper or neat paragraphs. It emerges alongside drawing, sound, movement, image, and gesture. Through photography, storyboarding, doodling, filming, voice recording, collaging, and mark-making, the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher brings presence, compassion, and excitement to the act of writing—treating it as part of a larger whole of communication and self-expression.

A key practice in this multimodal ecology is *diagrarting*, a concept I developed to describe an integrated way of working visually and verbally. Diagrarting combines *diagram*, *art*, and *dialogue*. It invites makers to work in a fluid, open-ended way: to draw, write, annotate, scribble, question, and reflect. At its core, diagrarting is a permission-giving practice. There is no single correct form; what matters is that the page becomes a thinking space. Whether the work is dense or spacious, representational or abstract, legible or playful, it is treated as *art*—not in terms of polish or prestige, but in its capacity to communicate feeling and foster insight.

The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher, by contrast, tends to treat visual elements as secondary or decorative. They may use pre-printed worksheets for mind mapping or ask students to fill in flowcharts with quotes from a text. These exercises may be useful, but in such classrooms, drawing is often deployed mechanically, with little opportunity for ownership or dialogue. The visuals serve

a function, but not an expressive one. They rarely provoke conversation, reflection, or flow.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher uses diagrarting to engage the whole learner. Inspired by theorists like Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), who emphasise the grammar of visual design, they recognise that many students think spatially and symbolically. Drawing, like freewriting, bypasses the overthinking mind. It taps into the intuitive, emotional, and embodied aspects of creativity. In this way, diagrarting is closely aligned with the freewriting pedagogy explored earlier in this book: it involves letting go of judgement, allowing mess and mystery, and seeing what emerges.

What distinguishes diagrarting is its visuality—and its dialogic nature. A diagrart invites the creator to speak back to it. "What did I draw here?" "Why did I choose this colour?" "What do I feel when I look at this line?" These questions can be internal or shared with a group. The drawing becomes a partner in thinking, just as a draft or journal might. As Fisher (2011) argues, meaningful learning is dialogic: it emerges through exchange, not just delivery.

In practice, diagrarting can take many forms. A student might map a story's structure using spirals or colour-coded threads. Another might respond to a poem with an emotional landscape, blending text and image. In a high-stakes revision session on *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, sixty students used diagrarting to visualise quotes, themes, and character arcs. Their work included cracked bones labelled "crack," concentric circles representing psychological pressure, bananas and rotten apples to explore the novel's structure, and symbolic illustrations of duality, repression, and violence (Gilbert, 2021).

The students described diagrarting as highly motivating. They said it helped them "understand physically," "enjoy revision," and "see the story more clearly." Some, unprompted, compared it to drawing in primary school—remembered fondly but no longer available in formal classrooms. Crucially, students not only retained more information but *felt* more connected to the material. As one wrote, "Diagrarting helped me understand things physically, and it will make enjoyable looking back at my notes and seeing what I learnt."

The visual, then, becomes a mode of *critical response* and of *creative generation*. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher encourages students to use diagrarting not only to reflect on existing texts but to plan their own. In writing workshops, diagrarts help students design characters, map emotional journeys, test out narrative perspectives, and visualise key images. Diagrarting supports both *analysis* and *invention*—providing the bridge between reading and writing, between consuming and making.

It also supports flow. As Csikszentmihalyi (2008) explains, flow emerges when challenge and skill are matched, and when the stakes are high enough to matter, but low enough to allow play. Diagrarting creates just such a state. It removes the pressure of writing something "correct," and opens space for curiosity. This makes it especially effective for students with low writing confidence. Because the drawing is seen as art, not as illustration or assessment, it creates a space of aesthetic freedom.

This resonates with the work of Gabrielle Roth (1998), whose 5Rhythms approach to dance was based on offering people permission to move freely. Diagrarting offers permission to *make marks* freely. It invites flow, staccato, chaos, lyricism, and stillness—all within a single page. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher encourages students to keep their diagrarts private if they choose, or to share them as conversation pieces. Either way, they are seen as serious—*not because they are refined, but because they are real*.

Ultimately, diagrarting draws together multiple pedagogies explored in this book: freewriting, multimodal literacy, emotional presence, dialogic learning, and mindful self-expression. It is not simply another strategy—it is a philosophy of teaching writing that recognises the importance of gesture, intuition, exploration, and voice. It gives students tools not only to *write*, but to *think*—and to feel safe while doing so.

When introduced mindfully, diagrarting transforms the writing classroom. It gives every student—regardless of ability, background, or confidence—a way in. A way to see. A way to speak. A way to begin.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

I drew before I wrote—
a spiral,
a house,
a face with no name.
It was not wrong.
It was a beginning.
The hand knew something
the pen forgot.
Now I draw again,
and listen.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. How do you currently use images, diagrams, and visuals in your teaching or creative practice?
2. When was the last time you made a "bad" drawing that taught you something?
3. What does it mean to treat all student mark-making as *art* rather than "work"?
4. How can visual dialogue—asking "what does this mean?"—enrich written expression?
5. How might diagrarting deepen students 'understanding of difficult texts or themes?

WRITING & DRAWING PROMPTS

- **Prompt 1:** Diagrart your writing process. Include scribbles, images, symbols, arrows, and words. Then, reflect: What does your process look like?
- **Prompt 2:** After reading a story, poem, or article, make a visual response—what colours, shapes, metaphors come to mind? Annotate freely.
- **Prompt 3:** Create a diagrart for an original character or setting. Use visual and verbal elements. Then write a scene inspired by it.

- **Prompt 4:** Freewrite for 5 minutes, then *diagrart* what you've just written. What new connections appear when you visualise it?

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- Share your diagrarts in small groups. What was the most surprising part of creating it? What did you discover only after drawing?
- Explore the difference between diagramming and diagrarting. How does intention change the process?
- Watch a short film or look at a photograph and invite students to respond with a visual piece—then discuss: *what did you notice when you drew that you didn't when watching/looking?*

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

- Integrate diagrarting into reading lessons: ask students to draw and annotate key scenes, metaphors, or emotions in texts.
- Use diagrarting as a regular low-stakes warm-up or cool-down in creative writing workshops.
- Encourage students to keep a "visual journal" as part of their writing notebook.
- After freewriting, give students time to create a diagrart from what they wrote—then reflect or revise with the visual as a guide.
- Invite students to create "revision diagrarts" to summarise a text's key themes, imagery, and structure in their own terms.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Before your next writing session, draw a single line. Follow it with your eyes.
Let your breath slow down.
Now place a word beside that line.
Let the mark and the word speak to one another.
Then, begin.

CHAPTER 12: REDRAFTING AS CREATIVE ACTION

MINDFUL PEDAGOGIES IN PRACTICE

Redrafting is often framed as a technical process—an editing task, a fix-up job, a polish for the sake of grades. But what if redrafting were understood instead as a vital creative act? A space of possibility? A moment for the writer to reflect, rethink, and reimagine?

In the policy landscape of England, where product-based pedagogies dominate both primary and secondary classrooms, redrafting is increasingly marginalised—particularly in secondary schools, where the pressure of exam-driven outcomes inhibits extended engagement with creative writing (Gilbert and Dobson, 2024). Drawing on our research into teacher practices across sectors,

this chapter argues that redrafting must be reclaimed as a pedagogical priority and a mindful moment in the writer's journey.

REDRAFTING: BETWEEN PRODUCT AND PROCESS

Redrafting sits at the heart of the creative writing process. And yet, in many classrooms, it is misunderstood. In *Towards boundary crossing* (Gilbert and Dobson, 2024), Tom Dobson and I explore how redrafting is conceptualised across primary and secondary landscapes of practice using Glăveanu's (2013) 5A's theory of creativity and Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2015) idea of landscapes of practice.

We found that while primary schools more frequently teach creative writing, the pedagogy often leans toward **product-based approaches**: teaching fixed genres, using model texts, and encouraging redrafting as the correction of grammar, punctuation, or vocabulary. In contrast, some secondary teachers—though teaching creative writing less often—were more likely to blend **process-based approaches** into their practice: using visual prompts, exploring open-ended tasks, and offering feedback to help students craft meaning for real or imagined audiences.

The key tension? In both sectors, **redrafting is more often seen as technical improvement than creative transformation**.

RECLAIMING REDRAFTING AS A CREATIVE ACT

Mindful creative writing pedagogy reclaims redrafting as a moment of deep reflection and choice. It is not a tidying exercise. It is the space where the writer negotiates meaning, engages with their own evolving "Superaddressee" (Bakhtin, 1986), and shapes their intentions with greater precision, subtlety, or play.

This view is echoed in the work of Elbow (1986), Bishop (1990), and Graves (1983), who advocate for feedback and redrafting as inherently dialogic and writer-led. Our own research reveals that when teachers adopt **teacher-writer identities**, they are more likely to value this kind of mindful redrafting. Primary teachers who regularly wrote themselves were more confident in creating space for creative risk-taking, trusting the process, and encouraging

agency. Their students, in turn, were more likely to see redrafting as a form of writerly ownership.

CASE STUDY: THE MINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER

A Year 6 teacher, newly leading English at their school, commits to a weekly creative writing session free from assessment pressures. Students are invited to write from visual, auditory, or poetic prompts, and redrafting becomes a time of "word play," experimentation, and self-reflection. Rather than correcting spelling, students reimagine metaphors, adjust narrative perspective, and recraft dialogue for emotional impact.

Crucially, this teacher shares their own writing and shows redrafts of a poem in progress—crossings-out, second thoughts, new openings. Students are encouraged to annotate their own drafts and explain their choices. Redrafting is not linear; it is recursive and creative. It's about finding what matters in the writing.

This approach, supported by process pedagogy (Graves, 1983; Bizzaro, 1993), models redrafting as exploration rather than correction, as crafting rather than compliance.

CASE STUDY: THE UNMINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER

A secondary English teacher introduces a short story assignment for GCSE preparation. Students are given a genre (gothic horror), a checklist of features (setting, suspense, sentence variation), and a rubric tied to exam criteria. Redrafting happens in purple pen: students must "improve vocabulary," "correct comma splices," and "add tension."

No space is made to ask: *What is the story trying to do? What emotion is it meant to evoke? How might I write it differently, not just better?* Students comply. A few become discouraged. Redrafting, in this model, becomes technical compliance rather than creative ownership.

This practice reflects a product-oriented landscape where assessment criteria govern pedagogy and the redrafting process is reduced to surface edits (Gilbert and Dobson, 2024).

BOUNDARY-CROSSING AND REDRAFTING AS MINDFUL DIALOGUE

A central recommendation of our research is the value of **boundary-crossing professional development**. Teachers across sectors benefit from shared inquiry into redrafting: not just how often it is done, but how it is conceptualised. When teachers work together—primary and secondary, writer and educator—they challenge narrow conceptualisations and begin to reclaim redrafting as a transformative act.

As Clark et al. (2017) suggest, professional hybridisation involves crossing the boundaries of practice to develop shared meanings. If teachers write alongside their students, share their redrafts, and reflect on the affective experience of reworking creative texts, they model a pedagogy of trust, resilience, and craft. Redrafting becomes part of the writer's identity, not just a classroom task.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM

Revision
What if redrafting
were not repair
but renewal—
a second chance
to mean
more clearly,
more strangely,
more truthfully?

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- How is redrafting framed in your classroom: correction, improvement, or transformation?
- What messages do you give about the purpose of revising work?
- How has your own experience of redrafting shaped your teaching?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Take a piece of student or personal writing. Redraft it for a different audience. What changes?
- Write a short reflection from the perspective of a student responding to feedback. How do they feel? What do they change—and why?
- Compose two versions of a poem or paragraph: one written quickly, one reworked thoughtfully. What do you learn in the process?

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- How does your school or curriculum value redrafting? What are the implications?
- Can redrafting be taught creatively within a product-oriented system?
- What do different metaphors for redrafting suggest (e.g. sculpting, gardening, weaving)?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Trial a redrafting journal: students annotate their edits with reasons, questions, and new ideas.
- Share your own redrafts as a teacher-writer and discuss the decisions you made.
- Facilitate a peer redrafting session where students suggest structural, emotional, or imaginative alternatives—not just corrections.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Before inviting students to redraft, pause. Ask: *What is this piece really about? What else might it become?* Set the intention to revise not for perfection, but for truth.

SECTION 2: SETTING BOUNDARIES, CREATING SAFETY AND FREEING THE IMAGINATION

Here we focus on the emotional architecture of the creative classroom. How do we make students feel safe enough to risk? What boundaries support—not restrict—imagination? These chapters offer practical strategies for building trust, navigating vulnerability, and creating a space where creativity becomes possible.

CHAPTER 13: WRITING WITH, NOT AT

OPENING POEM

I write when they write,
not always first,
not always best,
but always there.

Their pens scratch and pause—
so does mine.
Their groans, their laughter,
my echo in kind.

We sit in the hum of shared trying,
not knowing where the sentences will go,
but watching, together,
as meaning begins to show.

Writing alongside students is not a gimmick. It is a declaration of presence. A sign that the teacher is not above the work, but inside it—with them, beside them, struggling too. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher writes in class not to show how it's done, but to participate in the process: to feel the hesitation, the false starts, the occasional unexpected beauty.

This co-writing fosters reciprocity. It transforms the teacher from distant judge into companion and co-learner. When students see their teacher free-writing, pausing, rephrasing, they witness the truth: writing is difficult, even for experienced writers. But it is also possible. And more than that—it is worth it.

In contrast, the Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher stays at the front, arms folded, setting a timer. "You've got ten minutes," they say. "Start now." They do not write. They do not share. Writing is a task to be completed, not a relationship to be lived.

The mindful teacher understands that creativity is not an occasional treat. It is the spirit that suffuses all writing—not only in stories or poems, but in essays, reflections, even grammar exercises. When approached with imagination, any writing can be alive. Writing born of the creative spirit surprises both writer and reader.

It resists the formulaic. It asks something more of us, and gives something more back.

When I was writing *The Last Day of Term* (2011), I found myself listening—really listening. To the voices of students I had taught. To the internal monologue of a teacher stretched to breaking. To my own ambivalence about education and its cruelties. The novel takes place over one school day, but it spirals inwards to a longer meditation: what happens when creativity is squeezed out? What are we left with? Martin, the teacher at the heart of the story, is caught between compliance and care. His creativity—his impulse to write, to feel, to connect—keeps breaking through the cracks.

In creative writing lessons, the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher begins not with form or success criteria, but with feeling. "How are you today?" they ask. "What's been on your mind?" From there, writing can begin—not to perform, but to express. Mindfulness techniques such as breath awareness or momentary stillness help students drop into the present. Free writing follows: low-stakes, untimed or briefly timed, unjudged. The only rule? Keep the pen moving.

"Say what you need to say," the teacher says. "You don't need to share it—but if you do, you will be heard."

Simon Wrigley and Jeni Smith, founders of the National Writing Project UK, champion this approach. Their work showed that when teachers write with their students, the culture of the classroom shifts. Power disperses. Writing becomes reciprocal. The teacher is no longer the examiner but a fellow writer—uncertain, vulnerable, inventive (Wrigley & Smith, 2012).

This shift is not cosmetic. It changes the dynamic of learning. The classroom becomes a studio rather than a stage. Students feel safer to experiment, to fail, to try again. They realise writing isn't about getting it right the first time; it's about staying with the process, however messy.

Collaborative writing furthers this ethos. A class poem, a shared story, a group play-script—these are not just activities. They are acts of community. Students listen to one another, steal ideas openly, build on what's offered. The writing becomes layered with many voices. Meaning emerges through interplay.

The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher avoids this. They crave control. "Work in silence," they insist. "This is your assessment piece." Group work is rare, sharing is minimal. Creativity becomes a performance, not a process.

But creativity thrives in connection. When we write with others, we remember that language is social. Meaning is negotiated. Revision is collaborative. And writing—real writing—comes from a place of freedom. A powerful way to begin is through personal objects. Ask students to bring something meaningful—anything, as long as it has a story. First, they describe it. Then, they write from the object's point of view. From there, memories surface, metaphors form, stories unfold. Emotion becomes language. This approach, which I explore further in *The Dark Alleyway* (2016), helps students bypass the blank page and move straight into creative flow.

Writing in company also allows us to reflect on the act of writing itself. Students talk about what works and what doesn't. They notice what makes them pause. They notice what sets them free. They become more mindful, more metacognitive, more alive to language.

Ofsted's *Moving English Forward* report (2012) remains relevant here. It called for extended discussion, deeper engagement, and more time for writing. It cautioned against coverage-driven lessons and over-reliance on PowerPoint. Creative writing was not to be boxed into the margins, but brought into the heart of English teaching—and, by extension, of learning itself.

Assessment, too, must reflect this creative ethos. Rather than one final piece, the teacher gathers fragments: a notebook page, a phrase a student loved, a line spoken aloud in group time. A photograph of a planning session. A post-it note with a breakthrough idea. These become part of a portfolio that shows growth, not just output (Young & Ferguson, 2021).

In *The Last Day of Term*, there's a moment when Martin watches a boy draw instead of working. He doesn't scold him. He remembers himself at that age—wanting to make something, to say something, and not knowing how. That moment is a hinge. It reminds us that creative energy, when noticed, changes everything.

The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher misses such moments. They chase objectives. They dismiss doodles. They crush originality

with templates. But the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher notices. They leave space. They wait. They ask, gently, "What are you trying to say?"

Creativity is not an extra. It is not something to be wheeled out after the test is done. It is how we come to know ourselves and others. When we write with our students—truly with them—we offer something profound: presence, possibility, and the power of words to shape the world.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

THEMED POEM FOR DISCUSSION

"To Be Beside, Not Above" (Excerpted in the opening of the chapter)

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- When was the last time you wrote with your students? What did you notice—about them, about yourself?
- What assumptions do you hold about your own writing ability, and how might these influence your teaching?
- How do your students experience your presence in the classroom: as an assessor, a facilitator, a fellow writer?

WRITING PROMPTS

1. Write a piece where you imagine yourself as a student in your own classroom. What would you write under your own instruction?
2. Use the personal object method: find something that matters to you, describe it, then write from its point of view.
3. Free write for ten minutes on the prompt: *"Something I've never told my students."*

GROUP ACTIVITIES

- **Collaborative Poem**: Start with a single line. Pass it around the room; each student adds a new line. Read aloud at the end.
- **Dialogic Writing**: Pair students and have them co-write a scene or a letter. Encourage switching roles between 'writer 'and 'editor 'every few minutes.
- **Co-Writing Journal**: Keep a shared classroom journal where students and teacher write responses to a weekly prompt together.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Model your writing process aloud once a week: think, draft, revise in real time. Show your struggles.
- Build student portfolios not just of polished pieces, but of the journey—planning notes, reflections, conversations, and re-drafts.
- Use class discussion as a warm-up to writing—not to direct ideas, but to seed the atmosphere with possibilities.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Before your next writing session with students, take two minutes to sit quietly and bring your attention to your breath. Let go of the role of teacher. Settle into the shared space of creation. Say silently: "I am writing with them, not at them."

CHAPTER 14: SETTING BOUNDARIES WITH CARE

Creative writing classes often begin with introductions—of the tutor, the course, the expectations. But how those expectations are introduced makes all the difference.

The *Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher* strides into the first session with a kind of brisk efficiency. They're prepared, no doubt about that. Rules are listed on the board or in a PDF, delivered with crisp authority:

No eating in class. Be respectful. Don't interrupt. Stay silent when your work is being discussed. No negativity.

The students scribble dutifully in their notebooks. A few raise eyebrows. One or two glance at the clock. There's little space for questions, and less for nuance. Terms like "respect" and "negativity" go unexamined, as if self-evident. There is no invitation to reflect on what those words mean when you're exposing your interior world through writing.

The intention is protection—to shield the space from harm, and the tutor from chaos. But the effect is often the opposite. The atmosphere becomes tight, uncertain. Students may become cautious, wary of speaking too openly, or unsure whether laughter or challenge are allowed. There is clarity, but not connection. Authority, but not trust.

By contrast, the *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* approaches the first session differently. They still care deeply about safety and structure—but they know these things are most powerful when built *with* students, not *for* them.

Rather than leading with rules, they begin with dialogue. What do we need to feel safe here? What makes feedback helpful? How do we want to be with each other in this room? These aren't rhetorical questions. The group is encouraged to answer them, to contribute, to shape the space together.

That doesn't mean anything goes. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher still establishes clear boundaries. Feedback must have a purpose and be rooted in the writer's intent. No one is allowed to dominate, dismiss, or derail. If a student persistently undermines

others or turns workshops into a platform for venting about staff or the institution, the teacher will have a private conversation with them. If needed, the Senior Tutor will be involved. This isn't punishment—it's care. A boundary drawn gently, but firmly.

Importantly, the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher doesn't insist that students sit in silence while their work is being discussed—a convention that can feel alienating or even humiliating. Instead, writers are invited to be active participants in the process. They can tell the group what they're working towards, what kind of feedback would help, and how they'd like it delivered. The tone shifts from judgement to curiosity. The workshop becomes a collaborative reading of possibilities.

This approach is rooted in the belief that students thrive when they feel seen, not scrutinised. As bell hooks (1994) reminds us, true learning happens when classrooms are both intellectually challenging and emotionally safe. Discomfort, when it arises, is not avoided or punished—it's held gently, with the awareness that creative risk is delicate work.

Boundaries, in this model, are not rules barked out from behind a desk. They're negotiated agreements—visible like the edge of a rounders pitch, but shaped by context. Not always drawn with chalk, but with jumpers tossed on the grass, or a shared sense of "here is far enough." They are dynamic, relational, and responsive.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher holds the space with warmth and clarity. They breathe. They notice. They listen. They model how to sit with discomfort without letting it take over. They know that a classroom isn't just a delivery system for content—it's a living thing, and boundaries are what give it its form, not its limits.

POEM: BOUNDARY LINE (ROUNDERS)

No chalk, no white rope—
just jumpers flung down, a scuffed path,
the edge where the grass grows long and wild.

Here, the game begins.
You wait by the post,
palms full of wind and anticipation.

When the bat connects
and your legs spring forward,
you run not to escape, but to stay within.

That edge is not punishment.
It's agreement, shared and shifting—
a space where risk is real but held.

And if someone steps wide,
forgetting, or pushing, or unsure,
we pause. Re-mark. Begin again.

No umpire with a whistle.
Just all of us
watching the invisible line together.

USING POETRY TO EXPLORE BOUNDARIES: BOUNDARY LINE (ROUNDERS)

Rather than beginning a course with a list of rules, the *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* might begin with a poem.

At some point in the first few sessions—often after initial hesitations have softened but before the first workshop—they share *Boundary Line (Rounders)* with the group. They might read it aloud slowly, letting the images settle: *jumpers flung down," the edge where the grass grows long and wild," palms full of wind and anticipation."* There is often a quiet stillness after the last line: *watching the invisible line together."*

Then, the teacher asks: *What does this poem say about boundaries? Where are the boundaries in your creative life? How do we know when we ve stepped outside them—and what do we do next?*

This is not a warm-up exercise, or a clever metaphor tacked on to a policy. The poem becomes a shared language for talking about the delicate, shifting lines that shape any creative writing classroom. Students are invited to notice how the boundary in the poem isn't fixed—it's negotiated. Not chalked by authority, but marked by presence. Made of what's available: a scuffed path, a stretch of longer grass. It's *responsive*.

The *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* uses the poem to help students reframe their understanding of classroom norms. Rather than listing behaviours to avoid, the class discusses how to *play within* the space. What makes a classroom feel safe enough to take creative risks? How can we give feedback that's rooted in purpose and not in preference? What should happen when someone oversteps—not intentionally, but because boundaries were unclear, or emotions ran high?

The lines *we pause. Re-mark. Begin again."* become a gentle motto for the course. They offer an alternative to punitive reactions: the idea that the workshop is a human space, and that missteps are part of learning. If someone interrupts too often, offers careless feedback, or pulls the room off-centre with negativity, the teacher doesn't issue a warning. They breathe. They notice. They speak to the student, kindly and privately. Sometimes a quiet redirection is enough. Sometimes a firmer boundary is needed, or a conversation with a Senior Tutor. But the goal is always to *restore* the space, not to dominate it (Clegg, 2021).

This is what bell hooks (2008) describes when she writes about the classroom as "a location of possibility"—where structure is not a form of control, but of care. The *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* does not shy away from boundaries. But they use them wisely. Not as barriers, but as the shape that allows the work to happen.

By the end of term, the poem might be returned to, like a thread running through the group's shared experience. Students begin to recognise the invisible line they are co-holding. The poem becomes part of the room's architecture—not something displayed on a poster, but something lived and felt.

In this way, the poem is more than a teaching tool. It is a compact manifesto for mindful pedagogy. It reminds students—and tutors—

that creative risk requires structure. That care is not the absence of limits, but their thoughtful application. And that the most important boundaries are the ones we choose to honour together.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

This section invites you to pause, reflect, and write—engaging with your own experiences of boundaries in creative and educational spaces.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

Think back to a time when a boundary was clearly and kindly held in a classroom you were part of. What did it allow you (or others) to do or feel?

Recall a time when a boundary was vague, rigid, or crossed. How did it affect the group atmosphere? What did you need that wasn't offered?

Consider your own comfort zones. What are your needs when participating in creative learning? How might those needs compare with those of your students?

WRITING PROMPTS

Choose one of the following prompts to explore in creative form (poem, flash fiction, memoir fragment, or hybrid):

Write about a moment when someone crossed an invisible line—and what happened next.

Describe a boundary using metaphor: a fence, a fringe of grass, a silent glance, a curfew, a page margin. Let the image grow.

Imagine a classroom shaped entirely by mutual agreement. What does it sound like? What are the unspoken rules? What happens when someone breaks them?

Re-write *Boundary Line (Rounders)* in your own voice, drawing on a game, setting, or community from your own life.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

If you are working with peers, teaching colleagues, or students:

Share your poem or story and discuss what it reveals about your assumptions around safety, risk, and permission.

Use your writing to begin a co-creation of shared classroom expectations. What do people need to feel creatively brave?

Identify one or two boundaries you feel strongly about holding in your teaching—and explain *why*. What do they make possible?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

As you plan your next term or series of sessions, consider:

How and when will you introduce the idea of boundaries?

Could you begin with a poem, image, story, or question rather than a list of rules?

How will you involve students in shaping the classroom space?

What language will you use when something goes wrong?

A MINDFUL PROMPT

Think about your own ‘internal ’boundaries; when do you stop yourself from doing things that go over the edge of what is safe or good for you?

CHAPTER 15: SAFEGUARDING AND THE CREATIVE WRITER

Safeguarding is not a bolt-on policy or a ticked box at reception. For the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher, it is a posture of care—quiet, alert, embodied. It's the way the space is arranged, the softness in the language used, the moment of stillness when a student says something unexpected and the teacher knows, without knowing why, that this moment matters.

We live in complex times. Many teachers, visiting writers, and freelance creatives work across blurred boundaries—sometimes in schools, sometimes in libraries, sometimes online. It is easy to make mistakes. The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher is not negligent, just unaware. Perhaps they are new to working with children. Perhaps they've never been told the difference between disclosure and confession. Perhaps they are simply trying to survive in a system that offers little time to pause or train or reflect.

Take the teacher who turns up at a secondary school to run a poetry workshop. They are energised, generous, enthusiastic. They begin by asking students to write about a moment of regret, or the last time they cried. One student writes a line so sharp it cuts through the air. The teacher blinks. They praise the writing but do nothing else. They are not sure what's required. They do not ask for the safeguarding lead. They do not make a note.

In contrast, the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher has prepared differently. Before they even stepped into the building, they ensured their enhanced DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) was up to date. They asked for a copy of the school's safeguarding policy. They know who the Designated Safeguarding Lead is, and they know where that person's office is. When the student writes that line—*I disappear at home*—they do not panic. They breathe. They thank the student, and later, discreetly, they share their concern. They record what they noticed factually, not interpretively. They know they are not there to diagnose or resolve. They are there to notice, and to pass it on.

The statutory guidance *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (DfE, 2024) makes this clear: any adult working in a school, whether

teacher, visitor or volunteer, must be aware of the school's safeguarding protocols and must act if they are concerned about a child. Children are not mini adults. The rules are different. A child's request for confidentiality cannot override the duty to report. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher does not see this as a betrayal of trust, but a deeper form of it. *Because I care about you, I have to pass this on.*

In a community setting—a library, a youth centre—the lines are more porous. A group of young writers gather on a rainy Saturday, some shy, some eager. The Unmindful Teacher may leave the door open. They may not notice when one child wanders in and out. They may use language like *anything goes here* or *write your truth* without explaining that you don't have to share your pain to be a good writer. They may think freedom means lack of structure. But the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher knows better. They build a shared agreement with the group. They remind them: *You only have to share what feels right.* They hold the space gently, but firmly, like a rounders pitch marked with jackets and muddy paths—not imposed, but agreed upon.

Safeguarding is also emotional. Not just about bruises and bruising words, but about how people are held when they write. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher knows that "authenticity" is not about disclosure. It is about choice. It is about agency. It is about writing the door closed or open, and always being able to walk away.

When a student crosses a boundary—says something cruel, or tries to dominate the room—the Unmindful Teacher might ignore it, unsure how to respond. Or they might overreact. But the Mindful Teacher pauses. Re-marks. Begins again. Like in the poem:

If someone steps wide,
forgetting, or pushing, or unsure,
we pause. Re-mark. Begin again.

They know safeguarding is about repair. Not punishment. Not panic. Just the careful holding of something fragile, so it doesn't break.

Online, the risks multiply. In a virtual writing club for 13–17 year olds, the Unmindful Teacher might allow private submissions to their personal email, or forget to check who's actually on the call.

They may mean no harm—but harm doesn't require intention. The Mindful Teacher keeps the session structured. They use a secure platform, ask for cameras to be on at the start, and ensure a co-host is present. They understand that safeguarding online means safeguarding *differently*—more thought, more clarity, more intention.

Across all these settings in the United Kingdom, the same principles apply. Teachers must:

- Hold an enhanced DBS if working regularly with under-18s
- Never promise to keep a child's disclosure secret
- Pass concerns to a Designated Safeguarding Lead
- Keep records that are factual, timely, and confidential
- Understand the policies and procedures of the space they are working in

And perhaps most importantly, they must listen—not just with their ears, but with their presence. To the tone of a student's voice. To what's not being said. To the poem that isn't really about a dog dying, or the metaphor that lands a little too hard. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher does not jump to conclusions. But they pay attention. They trust their body's signals. They ask for help when unsure.

We teach in difficult times. Schools are stretched. Mental health services are underfunded. Teachers are tired. But mindfulness, in this context, is not a luxury. It is a responsibility. The ability to slow down, to be present, to notice what others miss—these are safeguarding skills. They are also writing skills. To hold complexity without rushing to fix it—that's what poets do. That's what good teachers do too.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM: THE CAPTAIN OF THE PAGE

You are not just a keeper of stories
or a thrower of sparks—
you are the captain of a vessel
filled with characters still becoming,

voices still unsure of their volume,
pages still wet with risk.
You scan the skies for weather—
a silence that falls too hard,
a sudden storm in a sentence,
a line that hides more than it tells.
You carry prompts like provisions:
enough to nourish, never overwhelm.
You hoist boundaries like rigging—
flexible, tested, strong.
The lifejackets are where they need to be.
You've checked the exits.
You've spoken with the shore.
You steer with a soft hand,
but you know where the currents shift.
You know how to call for help.
You know when to turn back.
It is not fear that makes you careful—
it is care itself.
You are trusted with their words,
but also with their worlds.
You are not just leading a session.
You are holding a space.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- What kind of captain are you in your teaching practice? Do you prepare for storms, or hope they won't come?
- Recall a time when you sensed something was wrong in a classroom or workshop. How did you respond? What do you wish you'd known then?
- Consider the environments you teach in. Who is responsible for safeguarding? Do you know where the policies are kept? Who the DSL is?

WRITING PROMPTS

Choose one of the following prompts to explore in free verse, narrative, or hybrid form:

- Write from the perspective of someone who spots a warning sign too late. What do they do? What would they do next time?
- Imagine a classroom as a ship—what does it carry, what does it weather, and how is it kept afloat?
- Write a short story about a boundary that is quietly, gently held—and the difference it makes.
- Create a persona poem in the voice of a teacher who learns to listen in new ways.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

If working with peers, students, or in a training session:

- Share your writing and reflect together on the emotional and legal dimensions of safeguarding.
- In small groups, brainstorm what emotional and physical safety looks like in a creative classroom. What would be in your 'safety toolkit'?
- Read the poem *Boundary Line (Rounders)* again. Discuss how it might help students understand their rights and responsibilities in a workshop.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Check your DBS status. If it's out of date, renew it. If you don't have one and you work with under-18s, apply.
- If you work in a school or youth setting, ask to see their safeguarding policy. Make a note of the DSL's name and contact details.
- Draft a short safeguarding paragraph to include in your workshop plans or artist's contract. This can outline how you respond to concerns, and how you protect participants ' wellbeing.
- Revisit your writing prompts. Are any too exposing? Could they be reframed to preserve creative freedom without emotional harm?

A MINDFUL PROMPT

Safeguarding is not censorship—it's the structure that lets people write with courage. What kind of structure are you offering?

CHAPTER 16: CONDITIONS FOR WRITING

The conditions in which writing begins matter just as much as the writing itself. A Creative Writing teacher does not simply hand over a prompt or distribute a set of lined books and expect meaningful work to emerge. Writing, especially journal writing, happens best when students feel safe, curious, and able to take risks—when they believe they are allowed to write without immediately being judged, corrected, or evaluated.

This is particularly true when working with younger writers. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher understands that when they ask a class of eight- or nine-year-olds to begin writing in journals, they are not only giving an instruction. They are initiating a relationship.

Not just between student and teacher, but between the student and their emerging writer-self.

To create this relationship, the teacher must first create the right conditions. These include the physical space—comfortable, not cramped; colourful, not sterile—but more importantly, the emotional tone. Children (and adults) will not write freely if they suspect they are being tested. They will not explore if they fear being exposed. They will not risk vulnerability if they expect their words to be taken and dissected.

The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher, though perhaps well-meaning, may overlook this entirely. They may expect the journal to function as a record of progress or neat evidence of learning. They may, with a brisk tone, set the task and then walk around pointing out missing full stops. Students, sensing this, begin to write what they think the teacher wants. They avoid mess. They avoid honesty.

By contrast, the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher is thinking about the room before the class even enters it. They are reflecting on what the journals will *mean* to the children. They model their own writing, not as a polished piece but as a work in progress. They laugh about the crossed-out lines, the doodles in the margins. They speak about writing not as a task but as a form of listening—to the world, to the self, to memory and imagination. They invite their students to make the journal their own. To write in pencil, in felt tip, in glitter pen if they must. To write standing up or curled in a corner. To write a sentence and draw a picture underneath. They say, "You don't have to show me what you write—unless you want to."

And then they share something else: the **writer's rights**.

These are not classroom rules. They are freedoms. Freedoms that invite each student to trust the page and trust themselves. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher speaks them aloud, perhaps while holding up their own journal, or even inviting students to create artistic responses to them:

The right **not to share**

The right **to change things and cross things out**

The right **to write anywhere**

The right **to a trusted audience**

The right **to get lost in your writing and not know where you're going**

The right **to throw things away**

The right **to take time to think**

The right **to borrow from other writers**

The right **to experiment and break rules**

The right **to work electronically, draw or use a pen and paper** (Wrigley, 2014)

But rather than simply reading the list, the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher turns the rights into creative provocations. Children are invited to make mini-posters or cartoons illustrating one of the rights. Others invent a character—a rule-breaking writer—who exercises these rights in playful, exaggerated ways. A child writes a story about a dragon who refuses to share her poems until she's ready. Another draws a map of all the strange places they might one day write: under the bed, on a rollercoaster, in a hot air balloon.

Some children compose poems out of the rights themselves—found poetry, blackout poetry, collaged manifestos of what writing means to them. These responses become a playful, empowering way of internalising not rules, but possibilities.

By turning the rights into creative invitations, the teacher signals that writing begins with agency. That these aren't just things students are allowed to do—they are things *writers* do.

And yet none of this can be sustained without ongoing reflection. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher is constantly checking in—not just with the students, but with themselves. They notice their reactions to student writing: the urge to fix, to praise, to dismiss, to rush. They notice how easily those reactions can shape the atmosphere of the room. They pause. They ask, *What is being asked of me right now?* And also, *What kind of teacher am I becoming?*

This is the core of mindful pedagogy—not perfection, but awareness. A willingness to observe your own instincts as part of the work. A belief that teaching writing is not about delivering content, but about tending to conditions. The journal, for both teacher and student, becomes a record not of achievement, but of becoming.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Take 10–20 minutes to engage with one or more of the following reflections. These are for your *Creative Reflective Journal*, and are not for anyone else unless you choose to share them. Begin by choosing your **target class**—the group of learners you are focusing on for this book. They might be your actual students or an imagined group you hope to teach one day. They could be 8-year-olds in a primary classroom, 17-year-olds preparing for exams, or retired adults in a memoir-writing workshop.

Once you have your class in mind, choose one or more of the following:

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

Which of the writer's rights would be most liberating for your learners? Which might they find surprising, challenging, or confusing? Which ones might you—consciously or unconsciously—struggle to honour as a teacher?

- **Creative task**:

WRITING PROMPTS

Choose one writer's right and respond to it creatively, as your students might. Write a short story about a character who "gets lost in their writing." Create a poem made entirely from crossed-out lines. Draw or describe the strangest place you might ever write.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Imagine presenting these rights to your class. Would you read them aloud? Put them on posters? Act them out? Let students invent their own rights? Draft a lesson outline—or simply sketch a vision of what this might look like.

A MINDFUL PROMPT

Write a conversation between your "teacher voice" and your "writer voice." What do they admire in each other? Where do they clash? How might they support each other more fully?

Allow your responses to be loose, playful, exploratory. Write in fragments if you need to. Draw if that feels right. This is not a product. It's a practice.

Let yourself begin.

CHAPTER 17: REWRITING THE WORKSHOP

FROM NORMS TO CONVERSATIONS

A STORY AT THE START

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher remembers a workshop early in their writing life:

"I submitted a story about two working-class teenagers navigating grief through magic realism. I was proud of it. It came from somewhere real. But during the workshop, I wasn't allowed to speak. The room filled with talk about 'clarity 'and 'too many characters 'and whether the language was 'consistent with literary style.'

No one asked what the story meant to me. No one asked why I'd chosen that form. When I left the room, I felt like I'd failed—not because the story wasn't good, but because it didn't fit.

I didn't write for weeks after that."

Years later, they realise: it wasn't the story that needed fixing—it was the format.

THE NORMATIVE WORKSHOP

In her important article *Voice of Authority: Theorizing Creative Writing Pedagogy* (2009), Rosalie Morales Kearns offers a sharp critique of what she calls the **"normative workshop."** This model, originating in the Iowa Writers 'Workshop and now widely imitated, rests on three problematic pillars:

1. The **gag rule** – the author cannot speak while their work is discussed.
2. The focus on **flaws** – feedback often centres on what's wrong, rarely on what's working.
3. **Unspoken norms** – there is rarely any reflection on what assumptions underlie judgments about "good writing."

This model, Kearns argues, does more than stifle learning. It reinforces power imbalances, discourages risk-taking, and silences those who already feel marginalised by race, class, gender, or educational background.

THE GAG RULE AND POWER

The gag rule is defended as a way to let the text "speak for itself'—and to protect the workshop from authorial defensiveness. But Kearns challenges this, noting how the gag rule can reproduce oppressive dynamics. Writers who already feel excluded are denied their voice at precisely the moment they are most vulnerable.

Kearns, a Puerto Rican writer, reflects on how the gag rule clashed with her cultural norms of dialogue and hospitality. "Staying silent or imposing silence is unacceptably rude," she writes. This forced silence is not culturally neutral—it reflects a Euro-American mode of discourse that may alienate others.

Moreover, the gag rule assumes that the teacher and peers hold objective authority over the work. But as Kearns points out, many published, award-winning stories would be torn apart in a workshop for the same "flaws" routinely identified in students 'work.

FLAWS, FAULTS, AND FEEDBACK

In the normative workshop, flaws become the focal point. Feedback often consists of vague or sweeping criticisms: "It didn't flow"; "I didn't connect with the character"; "It was too confusing." Rarely are these judgments substantiated or examined. What aesthetic norms are being used? Why are these the standards? Are other possibilities even imaginable?

Kearns calls for a fundamental shift: to treat writing as **in process**, rather than inherently flawed. Writers need space to **experiment**, to make odd choices, to try things out. Instead of fixating on mistakes, a mindful workshop asks: *What is the writer trying to do? What techniques are they exploring? What else could be tried, and why?*

TOWARD A MINDFUL, NON-NORMATIVE WORKSHOP

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher draws on Kearns 'vision of a **non-normative workshop**, grounded in respect, clarity, and shared exploration. In this space:

- The writer is **not gagged**, but leads or co-facilitates the conversation.
- Feedback is **descriptive first**, then optionally **prescriptive** (with consent).
- The work is treated as **in process**, not deficient.
- Norms are **named**, not assumed.
- The purpose of discussion is **mutual learning**, not judgment.

Kearns suggests that such a model can be supported by analysing published texts not for thematic content, but for **craft strategies**—backstory, point of view, transitions, scene construction. These discussions give learners a shared vocabulary and confidence, and they model the kind of close reading that helps everyone—not just the "workshopped" student—become a more conscious writer.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher also takes inspiration from composition studies, feminist pedagogy, and arts education. They ask: What if creative writing was taught more like painting, or movement, or music? What if feedback was about possibility, not perfection?

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES

1. WORKSHOP MEMORY

Write about a creative writing workshop you've experienced (as teacher or student). What model did it follow? How did it feel? What silences or tensions were present? What might have been done differently?

2. REIMAGINING THE WORKSHOP

Design your own alternative to the normative workshop. Consider:

- How the writer's voice is honoured
- How norms are made visible and discussed
- How feedback is framed and offered
- What kind of safety and generosity the space needs

3. DESCRIPTIVE BEFORE PRESCRIPTIVE

Try leading a workshop discussion that begins only with **descriptive observations** (what's happening on the page), followed by **optional suggestions** if the author requests them. Reflect on how this changes the tone of the conversation.

4. NORMS AND AESTHETIC STANDARDS

Reflect on what you've internalised as "good writing." Where did these standards come from? Who do they privilege? What kinds of work or voices might they exclude?

5. TEACHING REFLECTION

How might you scaffold creative writing workshops so they avoid the "seek-and-destroy" model? What rituals, guidelines, or cultural norms could you use to promote dialogue over judgment?

SECTION 3: REIMAGINING ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

Assessment often flattens creative writing—but it doesn't have to. This section rethinks how we respond to students 'work, offering feedback models that motivate rather than demoralise. We look at how formative, dialogic, and student-centred approaches can transform the writing process and reshape our relationships with risk, failure, and success.

CHAPTER 18: RETHINKING ASSESSMENT

MINDFUL APPROACHES TO EVALUATING CREATIVE WRITING

Assessment in creative writing remains one of the most contested and complex areas of pedagogy. Unlike disciplines where right and wrong answers are clearly defined, creative writing is subjective, personal, and deeply entwined with identity and affect. One reader's masterpiece may leave another unmoved. This fundamental variability raises critical questions: Can creative writing ever be assessed fairly? Whose judgement counts? Can assessment support, rather than inhibit, a writer's growth?

Rather than rushing toward rigid solutions, I begin—as the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher might—with four essential questions:

Why assess the work?

Who is assessing the work?

How might the work be assessed?

What exactly is being assessed?

In the article I co-authored with Tom Dobson (2024), *Becoming the Falconer*, we argue that assessment should not be a static, hierarchical judgement but part of a dynamic, dialogic process. Drawing on Bakhtin's (1981; 1986) theory of dialogism, we suggest that productive feedback stimulates an internal dialogue between the writer and their "Superaddressee"—a mental conception of the ideal reader who fully understands their intentions.

This model positions assessment as a catalyst for redrafting. It shifts the focus from the final product to the writer's evolving relationship with their work. When feedback is empathetic and dialogic, it enables the writer to take control of their redrafting process. Conversely, feedback that fails to acknowledge the writer's voice and intention can alienate, ossify, or even annihilate their internal reader.

CASE STUDY: THE MINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER

In a community-based programme for teenagers, the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher aims to make assessment empowering. At the beginning of the course, students reflect on what they hope to gain and what growth might look like for them personally. These reflections become part of their portfolios.

Rather than issuing grades, the teacher introduces a collaborative, student-centred model of assessment. Learners choose one piece to share and receive feedback using Elbow's (1998) reader-response strategies: *pointing*, *summarising*, and *describing emotional and sensory reactions*. Students also write short self-commentaries on their development, helping them articulate their own "Superaddressee" and track its evolution.

The teacher records reflections and participation through narrative feedback aligned with co-created criteria. The focus is on *growth*, *engagement*, and *writerly development*, not comparison or ranking. This aligns with what I and Dobson (2024) call the *productive gyre* of writing—an internal and external feedback loop that encourages creative transformation.

UNDERSTANDING "WWW" AND "EBI" IN EDUCATIONAL FEEDBACK

WWW stands for **"What Went Well"**, and **EBI** stands for **"Even Better If"**.

These acronyms are widely used in UK schools, particularly in formative feedback across subjects, including English and creative writing. They're often applied as a simplified structure to scaffold both teacher and peer responses. The idea is to provide a balanced form of feedback: celebrating success while offering a suggestion for improvement.

HOW THEY WORK IN PRACTICE

WWW – WHAT WENT WELL

This part of the feedback identifies strengths in the student's work. In the context of creative writing, this might include:

- Effective use of description
- Strong emotional tone
- An engaging opening
- Original use of metaphor

The goal is to boost confidence, validate effort, and show students what to replicate in future writing.

Example:

WWW: Your imagery in the second paragraph is really vivid – the simile about the sky being a bruised peach was powerful and original.

EBI – EVEN BETTER IF

This part suggests how the work could be improved. It should be constructive and actionable. In writing, this might include:

- Adding more dialogue to develop character
- Clarifying the narrative structure
- Varying sentence length for rhythm and impact

Example:

EBI: It would be even better if you developed the ending further—perhaps by showing how the main character changed.

LIMITATIONS IN CREATIVE WRITING CONTEXTS

While well-intentioned, the **WWW/EBI** model can **become reductive or formulaic** if used uncritically:

- It **risks flattening complex feedback** into shallow praise and vague critique.
- It can **limit dialogic feedback** that emerges organically from reader experience.
- Students often perform it as a **tick-box exercise** rather than engaging deeply with the writing.

- It **centres teacher/examiner expectations**, sometimes ignoring the writer's intentions.

In *Becoming the Falconer* (Dobson & Gilbert, 2024), we critique such feedback methods for their **lack of dialogic depth** and **empathy**. We argue that productive feedback, especially in creative writing, should engage with the writer's *Superaddressee*—the internalised ideal reader—and stimulate reflection, not just correction.

MOVING BEYOND WWW/EBI

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher might use the structure as a **starting point**, but expand it by:

- Asking students to **explain their writerly choices**
- Using **Elbow's reader-response methods** (pointing, summarising, emotional reactions)
- Encouraging **collaborative feedback** based on shared goals
- Promoting **student-led criteria** for feedback

This keeps feedback relational, empowering, and growth-oriented—hallmarks of a mindful practice.

CASE STUDY: THE UNMINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER

By contrast, the Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher distributes a grading rubric laden with abstract terms like "originality" and "literary flair" without scaffolding what these mean. Students submit stories and receive grades that often reflect the teacher's own aesthetic biases.

Feedback sessions are hierarchical. Peer reviews are mechanical—"WWW" and "EBI"—and lack the dialogic quality needed for authentic growth. The workshop replicates literary gatekeeping, privileging surface polish and marketable aesthetics over process and voice. As we observed in our article, this mirrors broader neoliberal educational agendas that treat writing as a *product* to be measured, rather than a *process* to be nurtured (Dobson and Gilbert, 2024; Price, 2020; Theriault, 2021).

BUILDING EMPATHETIC ASSESSMENT PRACTICE

The most powerful insight we reached through our research is this: feedback is not just about skill or content. It is affective, and relational. Writers are vulnerable. They expose their inner lives on the page. Feedback, therefore, carries emotional weight and psychic risk. For feedback to support redrafting, it must do more than instruct—it must *empathise* with the writer's intention.

Empathetic feedback means engaging with the writer's *Superaddressee*, listening for what the piece is trying to do, and responding in ways that invite creative rethinking. As we note, this requires that teachers see themselves not only as assessors but as co-writers, facilitators, and responsive readers (Bishop, 1990; Smith and Wrigley, 2016).

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM

Ways of Knowing
Not every tree must bear fruit
to be worthy of the soil—
sometimes the leaves are enough,
sometimes the shade,
sometimes the reaching.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

Why do you assess creative writing in your context? Is it to validate, to sort, to motivate, to guide?

What forms of assessment have you found empowering—or disempowering—as a teacher or writer?

What might an assessment rooted in trust, growth, and mindfulness look like?

WRITING PROMPTS

Write a short piece in response to a peer's story using only Elbow's techniques: point, summarise, and describe your experience as a reader.

Compose a self-assessment reflection on your most recent creative work: what did you discover, what challenged you, what would you like to explore next?

Invent a fictional assessment scenario in which the learner sets their own criteria. How does it unfold?

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

How do different types of creative writing teachers (healer, explorer, vendor, author, activist, learner) approach assessment?

Should students be involved in designing assessment criteria? Why or why not?

How might peer or self-assessment be adapted to suit different levels of experience?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Create a set of assessment criteria aligned with a specific pedagogical goal (e.g. exploring identity, experimenting with form).

Trial a reader-response feedback session using Elbow's methods. Note how it changes group dynamics.

Design an assessment portfolio that includes writing, self-commentary, and peer responses.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Before reading and assessing a student's work, pause. Breathe. Set the intention to respond with curiosity, not judgement. Ask: What is this piece trying to do? How can I honour its voice?

CHAPTER 19: MOTIVATION THROUGH FEEDBACK

Two writers, Maya and Jonah, joined the same creative writing course. Both were talented, imaginative, and willing to take creative risks. But by the end of the first term, their experiences could not have been more different.

Maya was thriving. Her writing had grown in confidence and originality. She was experimenting with voice and form, trying out new ideas. She spoke warmly of feedback she had received. "It feels like I'm in conversation with my writing," she said. "The feedback gives me space to think aloud, but also points a way forward." Jonah, meanwhile, had become increasingly withdrawn. Once prolific, he had stopped bringing new work to share. "It's just a list of what's wrong," he said. "Every time I get feedback, I feel smaller. I don't know what they want anymore."

The difference between them wasn't about talent or effort. It was about **motivation**—and how feedback and assessment had been handled. The **Mindful Creative Writing Teacher** had responded to Maya's work, while the **Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher** had marked Jonah's.

FEEDBACK VS ASSESSMENT: A MOTIVATIONAL DIVIDE

At the heart of the difference is the distinction between **feedback** and **assessment**. Feedback is a dialogue—a response to a developing piece of work. It can be personal, creative, exploratory, and provisional. It aims to support the writer as they grow. Assessment, by contrast, is often summative. It is formal, usually tied to criteria or grades, and comes at the end of a process.

Both have their place. But when feedback is treated like covert assessment—or when assessment is delivered without care—the result is often a loss of confidence and clarity. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher understands that **how feedback is given can either motivate or demoralise**. They offer critique, yes—but with choice, warmth, and a sense of purpose. The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher collapses the space between evaluation and encouragement,

offering 'constructive criticism 'that feels more like silent judgement.

Motivating feedback doesn't mean withholding challenge. It means placing critique within a relationship of respect, and always keeping the writer's journey in view.

FIVE MODES OF FEEDBACK

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher offers a range of feedback types, often giving the writer an opportunity to choose what would be most helpful. Below are five feedback modes, each with its own tone and purpose.

1. SUBJECTIVE FEEDBACK

This mode is personal and emotional. The writer might ask: *How did this piece make you feel? What stayed with you?* The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher might say, "That final image gave me a shiver—it really lingered." The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher, fearing this is too 'soft', may avoid emotional responses altogether, focusing only on technical flaws.

Subjective feedback is especially useful when a writer is lacking confidence, or when they are exploring unfamiliar ground. It reminds the writer that their work has an impact—that it matters.

2. ANALYTICAL FEEDBACK

Analytical feedback is structural and technical. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher might say, "The opening is strong, but the tension dips around the midpoint—what might help sustain momentum?" or "Your use of repetition is very effective here—was that a conscious choice?" The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher, by contrast, might say, "This lacks structure," without offering a way forward.

This kind of feedback is most effective when the writer is ready to revise and reflect, not when they are still trying to find their voice.

3. EVALUATIVE FEEDBACK

Evaluative feedback involves judgement. It assesses how well something works—though always in context. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher says, "The image of the burnt orchard is powerful—

perhaps it could be introduced earlier to carry more weight?" They use specific language, offer alternatives, and stay connected to the writer's intentions.

The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher might offer vague praise ("This is good") or harsh critique ("This doesn't work"), without clarity or care. Over time, this can lead writers like Jonah to question their worth.

4. CREATIVE FEEDBACK

Creative feedback is often the most surprising—and the most motivating. It's where the teacher or peers respond to the work with a metaphor, a visual image, or even a new piece of writing. "If this piece were a landscape, it would be a moor—bleak but beautiful," says the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher. Or: "This story feels like it's painted in watercolours—soft edges, bleeding light."

They might invite the group to write a poem in response, or offer playful prompts like: *What animal is this piece? What time of day does it evoke?* These imaginative responses help the writer see their work from unexpected angles and reignite curiosity.

The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher tends to see such activities as frivolous. They may favour clarity over creativity, missing the deep pedagogical value in metaphor, play, and risk.

Creative feedback can be especially helpful when a piece is hard to pin down or when the writer needs a fresh perspective. It is feedback as interpretation, as relationship, as art.

5. LEARNING-FOCUSED FEEDBACK

This form shifts the focus to the reader. It asks, *What did you learn from this piece? What questions do you now have?* The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher might say, "I found myself thinking differently about silence after reading this—how did you come to that idea?" It positions the writing not as a product to be judged, but as a provocation.

The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher may never offer this feedback at all, operating on the assumption that the goal is always to fix, not to reflect.

MOTIVATION, CREATIVITY, AND CARE

Maya flourished because she was offered feedback that recognised her agency, sparked her creativity, and aligned with her process. She was challenged—but also encouraged. Jonah, by contrast, experienced a kind of feedback that felt like judgement masquerading as advice.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher creates the conditions for growth. They do not flatter or shield—but they do *listen*, *offer choices*, and *frame critique in ways that inspire*. The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher may be efficient, even well-intentioned, but their feedback flattens difference and silences voice.

Feedback should not shrink the writer. It should call them more fully into being.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM: A KIND OF LANTERN

Not a red pen.
Not a score out of ten.
But a question,
A murmur,
A mirror held just right.
You didn't tell me what was wrong.
You told me what might grow,
And I believed you.
— For Maya, and all those still writing

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- Think of a time you received feedback that genuinely motivated you. What made it so effective?
- Now think of a time when feedback left you feeling stuck or demoralised. Was it the tone, the timing, the delivery—or something else?
- In your current practice, do you act more like the Mindful or Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher when giving feedback? What evidence supports your answer?

- How do you handle the balance between encouragement and critique? Do you ever withhold necessary challenge for fear of hurting a student's confidence—or deliver too much critique too soon?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Write a dialogue between the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher and the Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher as they discuss a student's story. Let each voice speak fully—then reflect: who would you rather receive feedback from, and why?
- Compose a piece of creative feedback in response to something you've written recently. Use metaphor, colour, weather, or animal imagery. What new insight does this yield?
- Draft a feedback preface you could use in your own workshop or classroom: "What kind of feedback would you find most helpful today?"

DISCUSSION STARTERS

- Should students be given the opportunity to choose their preferred mode of feedback? What might the benefits and risks be?
- How can we teach feedback as a skill—not just a response? What structures can support that in a creative writing setting?
- Can feedback ever be too kind? Can critique be too blunt? Where do we draw the line between honesty and harm?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Introduce a **Feedback Menu** in your next session. Offer students a selection:
    - "Please respond to how this piece made you feel."
    - "Tell me what's working technically."
    - "Use metaphor to describe what the piece evokes."
    - "Let me know what you learned or what questions you have."

- Model a round of **Creative Feedback** in your classroom. Read a short piece aloud, then ask: *What colour is this story? What season? What sound?* Let the feedback emerge from the imagination.
- Review the last batch of written feedback you gave. Highlight any phrases that might feel evaluative or ambiguous. Rewrite at least one comment using the voice of the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Before your next workshop or one-to-one tutorial, take a quiet moment and ask yourself:
Am I here to mark this, or to meet it?
Let your answer shape your response.

CHAPTER 20: ASSESSING YOURSELF AND YOUR OWN WRITING

THE MINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER'S APPROACH

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher knows that assessment is not an end-point but a continuous, reflective practice. It is less about judgment and more about awareness—of intention, impact, and process. When inviting students to assess their own work, the Mindful Teacher doesn't hand over a checklist but offers a lens: What are you trying to say? What choices have you made? What is working, and what feels unfinished or unclear?

Assessment becomes a form of deep listening—to the text, to the self, to the reader imagined or real. This self-assessment is framed not as a final verdict but as a way of opening up space for further creation, refinement, and discovery. Students are encouraged to consider their positionality: Who is speaking? From where? To whom? Why?

THE UNMINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER'S APPROACH

By contrast, the Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher sees assessment in binary terms: pass/fail, good/bad, competent/incompetent. They may impose rigid genre conventions or demand students mimic professional writers without understanding the context behind those forms. Self-assessment, if it happens at all, is limited to proofreading or making surface-level edits. The deeper layers—voice, perspective, tone, intention—are left unexamined.

The Unmindful Teacher may hand out a rubric filled with technical terms, assuming that ticking boxes equates to learning. This approach breeds anxiety and perfectionism rather than confidence and insight.

CASE STUDY: REFLECTIVE ASSESSMENT IN PRACTICE

In a workshop exploring narrative perspective, the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher introduces Mills 'framework from *The*

Routledge Creative Writing Coursebook, asking students not just to read but to try out the modes themselves. A student experiments with "extreme realism" but finds the voice too stark. Through peer feedback and self-reflection, they realise the piece needs emotional layering, so they shift the focaliser from omniscient narrator to first person.

The teacher gently encourages the student to read their piece aloud, noticing where their attention wavers. They discuss *why* certain moments feel flat, *how* dialogue can sharpen character conflict, and *what* images linger after the story ends. Together, they reframe assessment as a generative act.

KEY TEACHING STRATEGIES

- **Reading Aloud**: Encourage students to read their work aloud to detect rhythm, tone, and clarity.
- **Peer Dialogue**: Use dialogue, not grading, as the primary mode of feedback. Ask: What surprised you? What did you want more of?
- **Genre Exploration**: Prompt students to try Mills 'listed techniques—magic realism, retellings, narrative image—to understand how form shapes meaning.
- **Character Anchoring**: Ask learners to focus on the Who of their stories. Who is telling the story, and what do they want?
- **Foregrounding Revision**: Make revision visible. Model your own rewrites. Show that cutting, reordering, and re-imagining are not failures but forms of deep engagement.
- **Avoiding Explanation Overload**: Use Mills '"Author Keep Out" metaphor to teach restraint. Encourage trust in the reader's imagination.
- **Layered Reflection**: Invite ongoing journalling in the Creative Reflective Journal (CRJ) to trace how a piece evolves over time.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM

Rereading
You thought it finished—tight as thread,
but now the seam reveals its slip.
A line you loved has turned to lead,
another hums upon your lip.
You are not done. You've just begun.
Revision is the real first draft.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

How do you know when a piece of writing is "done"?

What strategies help you shift from writer to reader?

What emotions come up when assessing your own writing?

Can you think of a moment when revision led to a breakthrough?

WRITING PROMPTS

Rewrite a scene from a different character's point of view.

Take a paragraph you like and revise it by changing its tense. What effect does this have?

Pick a piece of writing and try reading it aloud. Where does your attention wander?

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

Share one piece of writing that felt "complete" at first but changed significantly after feedback or time away.

Discuss how genre expectations can shape self-assessment. What happens when you intentionally break those expectations?

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Create a self-assessment checklist inspired by Mills and your own preferences. Use it after each draft to guide revision. Include questions about voice, structure, pace, and emotional resonance.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Sit quietly with your latest piece of writing. Without making any marks or changes, reread it as if someone else wrote it. What do you notice that you didn't before?

SECTION 4: DECOLONISING AND DIVERSIFYING THE CREATIVE WRITING CLASSROOM

Creative writing is never neutral. This section confronts the colonial legacies embedded in workshop norms, canon formation, and language hierarchies. It invites you to explore storytelling as a decolonial act, and offers ways to centre multiple voices, languages, and cultural perspectives in your teaching.

CHAPTER 21: WHITENESS, DECOLONISATION AND CREATIVE WRITING

A STORY AT THE START

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher begins by holding up a copy of *Robinson Crusoe*.

"We're often told this is one of the first novels in English. A story of survival. Of a man making a life on a desert island. But what happens when we read it not as a heroic tale—but as a blueprint for colonialism?

Crusoe meets Friday. Friday must be taught to speak. To dress. To serve. The island is mapped. Owned. Ordered. Crusoe doesn't just survive—he dominates. He narrates the land, the people, and the future into submission."

They pause.

"That's what I want us to think about today—not just what creative writing *says*, but what it *sees*, what it *assumes*, and what it *forgets*."

CREATIVE WRITING AND THE COLONIAL GAZE

In their powerful book *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*, Raj Patel and Jason Moore argue that modern capitalism—and its accompanying environmental and social crises—are not simply the result of human activity writ large, but of a specific, historical worldview. They reject the term *Anthropocene*, which blames humanity in general for planetary collapse, and instead propose the *Capitalocene*—a term that places the responsibility squarely on systems of capitalist exploitation and colonisation.

One of the key insights of their work is that colonisation is not just an economic or military act. It is a **way of seeing**. It is a worldview that positions the observer—typically a white, male, Enlightenment figure—as disembodied, rational, superior, and separate from both land and other people. Descartes's mind-body split becomes a metaphor for this: "I think, therefore I am" unhooks the thinker from the world, allowing him to observe—and dominate—it from a so-called neutral position.

Patel and Moore write:

That gaze always belonged to the Enlightened European colonist... rendered the emerging surfaces of modernity visible and measurable and the viewer bodiless and placeless."

This gaze shaped not only colonial maps, economies, and policies—but also stories. In creative writing, this gaze becomes the narrator who sees others from above, the omniscient voice that knows everything, the plot that frames indigenous cultures as backgrounds to white journeys.

WHITENESS AS A NARRATIVE POSITION

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher helps students unpick this narrative stance—not to shame them, but to make visible what has long been hidden. They ask:

Who gets to tell the story?

Who is seen, and who sees?

What language is used to describe the land, the body, the "other"?

Using *Robinson Crusoe* as a case study, they guide learners through the way language itself becomes a tool of colonisation. As Rehman (2013) points out, Crusoe's linguistic control over Friday represents an early moment in "English linguistic imperialism." Friday becomes a character only insofar as he is narrated—defined—by Crusoe.

This is not just history. The colonial gaze lives on in writing prompts, in characterisation, in point of view. Whiteness, in this context, is not about skin colour alone—it is a system of sight, a voice trained to be everywhere and nowhere, a perspective masked as objectivity.

DECOLONISING THE GAZE

To decolonise creative writing is to question that gaze. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher helps learners shift from an abstract, omniscient voice to an **embodied, situated** one. They model writing that owns its positionality: *I am writing this from here, from now, from this body and this history*.

They invite students to explore voice from the ground up. To write in dialect, in fragments, in breath. To tell stories not from the

bird's-eye view but from the soil, the street, the shoulder. They use metaphors of ecology: composting old stories, growing new ones from layered histories, acknowledging the rot as well as the bloom.

They encourage learners to listen to the land—not as a backdrop, but as an active presence. They foster writing that pays attention to more-than-human worlds, that asks: *what does the river remember? what does the wind mourn?*

This is not about abandoning craft. It is about changing the frame. Who gets to be the subject? What does a decolonised point of view feel like on the page?

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES

1. READING WITH NEW EYES

Choose a short extract from *Robinson Crusoe* or another canonical colonial text. Rewrite the scene from the perspective of the land, the water, or the "othered" character. What changes? What becomes visible?

2. UNLEARNING THE GAZE

Write a paragraph in the voice of an "omniscient narrator." Then write the same scene again in first-person, rooted in the body, the senses, and a specific location. Reflect: What did the voice hide? What did it reveal?

3. WHITENESS AND WRITING

In your journal, reflect on how you were taught to write. Were certain ways of seeing or narrating presented as "universal" or "good"? What perspectives were missing?

4. DECOLONISED ECOLOGY

Write a piece that connects you with the more-than-human world—a tree, a fox, a storm, a patch of ground. Avoid personifying them. Instead, ask: how does this being shape my story?

5. TEACHING REFLECTION

How might you help students examine "whiteness" in creative writing without shame or defensiveness? What examples, questions, or stories could support this process in your classroom?

CHAPTER 22: DECOLONISING CREATIVE WRITING

Creative writing does not emerge from a vacuum. It is shaped—like all cultural production—by the histories, ideologies, and power structures of its time. Yet, in many classrooms, this context is left unexplored. The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher presents writing as universal, as somehow separate from politics or history, as if craft and content were neutral, and creativity a pure, individual pursuit. In such spaces, the legacy of colonialism is rarely, if ever, acknowledged.

The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher may be enthusiastic and well-meaning. Their syllabus is likely to be stocked with familiar names: Hemingway, Carver, Atwood, Eliot, perhaps some Auden or Woolf. They encourage "finding your voice," but that voice must conform to certain norms—usually those shaped by white, Western, and heteropatriarchal standards of literary value. The teacher may correct dialect as "incorrect," steer students away from hybrid forms, and praise work that mirrors the canon they themselves were trained in. As Frantz Fanon observes in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), the colonial system operates not only through military or economic force, but through the internalisation of its cultural hierarchies; it teaches the colonised subject to desire the coloniser's language, his worldview, his stories.

In such a class, colonialism remains invisible, not because it is absent, but because it is foundational. Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) reminds us that "no European writer has been immune from the ideology of empire" (p. 63), and yet the Unmindful Teacher positions the canon as apolitical, timeless, and above all, universal. Creative writing here becomes a celebration of the "Great Tradition," the very tradition that T.B. Macaulay lauded in 1835 when he insisted that English literature was "more valuable than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together." This was not mere rhetoric—it was the ideological engine of the British colonial education system, designed to produce loyal colonial subjects who would think, write, and feel in English.

The result, as Nelson Mandela later reflected, was an education in which "British ideas, British culture, and British institutions were automatically assumed to be superior," and where "there was no such thing as African culture." The creative writing classroom, if unmindfully taught, continues this legacy by privileging certain aesthetics, marginalising others, and erasing the linguistic, cultural, and formal diversity that students may bring with them.

In contrast, the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher enters the classroom not as a gatekeeper of culture, but as a co-inquirer. They acknowledge that creative writing is a deeply contested space—one shaped by colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, and racism—and they invite students to explore these entanglements, not ignore them. Their pedagogy begins with positionality: they are open about their own cultural and ideological location, and they encourage students to reflect on theirs. They create space for "thick" mindfulness (McCaw, 2020), where attention is not merely focused inward but also outward, toward systems, structures, and histories.

In this classroom, silence is interrogated. A student who writes in patois is not corrected but celebrated. A story written from the perspective of a river, echoing the oral storytelling traditions of Somali folktales, is treated with the same seriousness as a tightly structured short story in the style of Chekhov. The Mindful Teacher understands, as Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) argued, that identities and experiences are shaped at the intersection of race, gender, class, and more—and that any creative writing pedagogy that does not attend to this is incomplete.

Their syllabus draws on diverse voices, from Toni Cade Bambara to Grace Nichols, from Steve Roberts" 'Black Reflections" to Yasmin Glinton Poitier's poetry in Bahamian dialect. The act of writing is framed as both personal and political, both aesthetic and ethical. Students are asked not just to craft elegant metaphors, but to consider the implications of their narratives: Who speaks? Who is silenced? What histories are remembered, and which are erased?

This teacher foregrounds decolonisation not as a metaphor, but as a practice—as an ongoing struggle to dismantle the colonial structures embedded in language, pedagogy, and curriculum. Drawing on Patel and Moore's (2018) *A History of the World in*

Seven Cheap Things, they help students explore how colonialism cheapened not only land and labour, but also language, care, and creativity. They use creative tasks that reframe and reimagine: a found poem using the racist language of politicians and rewriting it with care; a recipe poem inspired by Benjamin Zephaniah's "The British Poem," which challenges the idea of cultural purity and celebrates hybridity.

Mindfulness here is not about calm detachment—it is about engaged attention to what Toni Giselle Stuart calls "the water that remembers" (2020) It is about reading the silence in Austen's *Mansfield Park*, where the slave trade is alluded to, but never interrogated, and teaching students to write into that silence. It is about acknowledging the violence and complexity of history, and then finding creative forms to process, resist, and reimagine.

A decolonised creative writing curriculum, as John Yandell (2020) notes, does not turn its back on history—it enables students to understand that "there is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (Benjamin [1955] 1970, p. 259). The Mindful Teacher embraces this paradox, offering students both historical understanding and imaginative possibility.

Above all, the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher offers care—not as sentimentality, but as an ethic of pedagogy. They do not see their role as correcting the student into conformity, but as holding space for uncertainty, multiplicity, and transformation. They challenge norms with kindness. They make room for rupture. They understand that to teach writing is to teach power, and they choose to do so consciously.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

A POEM TO BEGIN:

"The Paper Was Never Neutral"

The ink I use was once a trade,
shipped in barrels from ports with names
I cannot pronounce but someone once owned.
The paper came from pulped forests
cleared on land no longer called its name.
The pen was a prize, its nib a claw,
scratching lines across empires.
The books were bound by hands that never wrote them,
funded by fortunes made in sugar, cotton, spice.
And still we write,
hoping to unpick the stitch
without tearing the cloth.

Let this page hold more than silence.
Let it speak what was silenced.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. What were the first stories you were told? Who told them? In what language? What values did they carry?
2. Whose literary traditions have shaped your idea of "good" writing—and where did you learn this?
3. In what ways have your identity, education, or cultural background influenced the stories you believe are worth telling?
4. Have you ever changed your voice, language, or story to "fit" a perceived standard? What did it feel like?

DECOLONISING CREATIVE WRITING: ACTIVITIES

Choose one or more of the following writing prompts to explore your own positionality and cultural inheritance.

1. PERSONAL LANGUAGE HISTORY

Write a short prose-poem, story, or monologue tracing the languages and dialects you have encountered in your life. How have these shaped your identity and your writing voice?

2. THE STORY OF MY NAME

Explore the history of your name. Where does it come from? What are its connotations, memories, or burdens? How has your name been perceived or misperceived by others?

3. LETTER TO AN ANCESTOR

Write a letter to someone in your family line—real or imagined—telling them who you are now. What do you carry from them? What have you shed? What would they not understand?

4. PRIVILEGE AND POWER

Reflect on your own position in relation to systems of privilege, such as race, class, or whiteness. Write a creative response: a poem, short story, or essay that explores this dynamic honestly and imaginatively. Try beginning with the line: *"I didn't know I was privileged until…"*

5. CUT-UP FOUND POEM

Take a piece of colonial language—Macauley's 1835 quote, a political speech, a news article—and cut it up. Rearrange the words into something "rich and strange" that speaks back to power.

6. RECIPE FOR MYSELF

Write a "recipe poem" for your identity. What ingredients make you who you are—cultural, emotional, linguistic, geographical? Be bold and unapologetic in your mix.

7. THE RIVER REMEMBERS

Write from the perspective of a river that runs through your life or ancestral land. What has it seen? What does it carry? What would it say to you?

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- Why is it important to decolonise the creative writing classroom?
- In what ways does "standard English" act as a gatekeeper? How can we subvert it?
- What does it mean to write "from the margins"? Can the centre be moved?
- What responsibilities do creative writing teachers have in relation to positionality and care?

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Revise a piece of your writing, considering how colonial or hegemonic norms may have shaped its form, language, or assumptions. Could it be told differently? Who else might be given voice?

Alternatively, create a new piece that intentionally resists the norms of "canonical" writing—experimenting with form, dialect, structure, or point of view.

A MINDFUL PROMPT

Sit quietly and notice your breath. Now place your hand on your chest or abdomen.
Say quietly to yourself: *I come from somewhere.*
Repeat: *I carry many stories.*

And again: *I have a right to speak, to listen, and to imagine.*
Let this truth guide your writing.

CHAPTER 23: STORIES THAT CANNOT BE CALLED BACK

A STORY AT THE START

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher enters the room slowly, places a small stone on the desk, and begins with a story—not from a book, but from the air around them.

"Long ago, the sun and the moon sat together in silence. They watched the Earth, their child, growing wild with stories. The moon, quiet and cool, asked, 'Why do they always forget what came before?'

The sun, bright with memory, replied, 'Because no one taught them to carry the old stories well.'

'And what of the stories that harmed? 'the moon whispered.

The sun dimmed. 'Those too must be carried, 'it said. 'Not to repeat them, but to remember. To retell them differently. The only way forward is through the story.'"

The class sits quietly. A few write, some look up. The room has shifted.

"That's what we're doing today," the teacher says, "remembering stories we've inherited—and beginning to tell new ones."

STORIES THAT CANNOT BE CALLED BACK

Following on from our exploration of decolonising creative writing and storytelling as a foundational human impulse, this chapter deepens our focus on what Hampton and DeMartini (2017) describe as *stories that cannot be called back."* They argue that once colonial narratives have been told—through education, media, literature, and everyday language—they become embedded. They cannot simply be erased or wished away.

"We cannot simply erase colonial stories and decide we will no longer be influenced by colonial ideology and thus make it so. The only way to account for these colonial stories is to engage with them and directly confront the tensions, discomfort, and difficult truths they raise" (p. 263).

This recognition informs the work of the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher. They understand that creative writing does not exist in a vacuum; it is shaped by the cultural stories we carry, both celebrated and contested. Their role is not to sanitise the past or replace one canon with another, but to open space for *critical literacy*: the capacity to read and write with awareness of power, history, identity, and land.

STORYTELLING AS A DECOLONIAL PRACTICE

Hampton and DeMartini's research involved participants of diverse cultural backgrounds—descendants of French and Anglo settlers, Filipino-Canadian, Italian-Canadian, and members of the Kanien'kahá:ka Nation—telling stories in relation to land. This ecological approach to storytelling links place, history, and identity. Stories are not just about people; they are about where people live, what they remember, and how they interact with the world.

This echoes the work of Freire (2014) and hooks (2014), who both emphasise the need for education to become a site of liberation. Freire speaks of *praxis*—the merging of reflection and action—while hooks frames teaching as an act of freedom and transformation. For both, storytelling is not a retreat from truth, but a method of confronting and rewriting it.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher brings this awareness into their practice. They ask: How do our stories reflect our understanding of land, of each other, of selfhood? What stories have we inherited, and how might we retell them? How do we equip our students to tell stories that remember the past without being confined by it?

UNDERSTANDING THE SEVEN BASIC PLOTS

These archetypal story patterns are not rules but recurring shapes that have been identified across cultures and historical periods. Popularised by Christopher Booker and summarised in accessible texts like *Creative Writing for Dummies* (Hamand, 2009), these plots can be generative starting points—but they also reflect certain cultural assumptions. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher encourages students to use them not prescriptively, but playfully and critically.

1. OVERCOMING THE MONSTER

This is the classic battle between good and evil, in which the protagonist must face a powerful antagonist (the "monster")—a literal creature, a villain, or a metaphorical force (e.g., addiction, oppression, illness).

Traditional structure: The monster threatens the community → the hero rises → there is a confrontation → the monster is defeated.

Mindful perspective:

Who or what is defined as "the monster"?

Are we reinforcing ideas of 'otherness 'or using colonial tropes (e.g. 'savage lands', 'uncivilised enemies')?

Could this plot be inverted, told from the perspective of the so-called "monster"?

Example: A student writes a story in which the "monster" is systemic racism, and the protagonist overcomes internalised narratives about their own worth.

2. THE QUEST

A journey with a purpose: the protagonist sets out to find or retrieve something of great value, encountering trials and allies along the way.

Traditional structure: Departure → challenges → allies and enemies → transformation → return with the prize.

Mindful perspective:

What kind of journey is this: physical, emotional, ancestral?

Is the "quest" a colonial expedition, or a personal search for identity?

Can the "prize" be redefined—e.g., reconciliation, understanding, healing?

Example: A student writes about reconnecting with a lost language or cultural tradition as their quest.

3. VOYAGE AND RETURN / COMING OF AGE

A character ventures into an unfamiliar world, undergoes challenges or transformation, and returns changed.

Traditional structure: Departure → strange world → crisis → learning → return.

Mindful perspective:

Who gets to go on "voyages" and safely return?

What if the "strange world" is actually a classroom, a new identity, or migration?

How does this connect with coming-of-age narratives across different cultures?

Example: A student writes a coming-of-age story set in an English language classroom, where their first language becomes a source of tension and strength.

4. RAGS TO RICHES

The protagonist starts in poverty, obscurity, or weakness and rises to wealth, success, or glory. Often includes a moment of fall and recovery.

Traditional structure: Humble beginnings → rise → crisis or fall → final success.

Mindful perspective:

What are the dangers of equating "riches" with capitalist success or Western validation?

Can "riches" be redefined (e.g., community, healing, self-worth)?

How does this plot reinforce or resist class, gender, or racial hierarchies?

Example: A student explores their journey from marginalisation to artistic recognition—not through external validation but through reclaiming their voice.

5. ROMANCE OR CLASSICAL COMEDY

In its older literary sense, a romantic or comedic plot involves confusion, separation, disguise, and eventual resolution—often ending in union, harmony, or celebration.

Traditional structure: Conflict or misrecognition → complications → enlightenment → happy resolution.

Mindful perspective:

Whose relationships are deemed "worthy" of comedy or romance?

Can this plot be queered or decolonised?

How can we challenge traditional gender roles or romantic norms?

Example: A student writes a story where the comedy arises from cultural misunderstanding—but resolution comes through mutual respect and difference, not assimilation.

6. Death and Rebirth / Redemption

The protagonist experiences a symbolic death—loss, despair, destruction—and then transformation and renewal.

Traditional structure: Fall → darkness or death → revelation → new beginning.

Mindful perspective:

Can this plot be used to address historical trauma or community healing?

How can we avoid "redemption" arcs that oversimplify suffering or force premature hope?

Example: A student writes a story of intergenerational trauma, where "rebirth" is not forgetting, but finding a way to live with grief.

7. THE TRAGEDY

A downward arc: the protagonist is brought low by a fatal flaw, poor choices, or forces beyond their control. The story ends in loss, destruction, or insight.

Traditional structure: Rise → flaw or fall → consequence → tragic end.

Mindful perspective:

Can tragedy be used to explore systemic injustice rather than personal failure?

How do we avoid pathologising or stereotyping marginalised characters?

Is there dignity in telling tragic stories that do not offer false resolution?

Example: A student tells the story of a character navigating hostile immigration systems. The "tragedy" lies not in their flaw, but in the world around them.

By encouraging learners to see these plots as scaffolds—not boxes—the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher opens up space for subversion, re-vision, and radical re-telling. These patterns can help us find shape in chaos—but they must be engaged with critically, especially when working with stories of identity, resistance, and social transformation.

Would you like a classroom handout summarising these plots and questions? Or a visual graphic version for slides or reflective journals?

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES

1. A STORY RETOLD

Choose a colonial or "classic" story you know well—perhaps a fairy tale, folk story, or national myth. Retell it from a marginalised perspective: an excluded character, the land itself, or a silenced witness.

2. PLOT YOUR LIFE, LIGHTLY

Using the Seven Basic Plots as inspiration, sketch a story of your own life or a key event in your life. Which narrative arc best fits? Overcoming? Quest? Tragedy? Comedy? Allow yourself to fictionalise. Afterwards, reflect: what does this reveal about how you frame your experiences?

3. LAND AND STORY

Think about a landscape that has shaped you—a city, a field, a block of flats, a forest, a border. Write a short story in which that place tells its version of your story.

4. CRITICAL LITERACY THROUGH STORY

In your creative reflective journal, write about a story that shaped how you saw yourself—or others. What ideology did it carry? What

questions does it raise now? How could you teach this story differently?

5. TEACHING FOR THE FUTURE

Respond to Hampton and DeMartini's idea of storytelling as an intergenerational commitment. Why might teaching decolonised storytelling be important for future generations? What small steps can you take to make your classroom a space for different stories?

CHAPTER 24: WRITING THE SELF

A DECOLONISING AUTOBIOGRAPHY

A STORY AT THE START

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher begins with a story—not a model answer, but a lived experience:

"When I was thirteen, I heard *Ghost Town* by The Specials for the first time. It was more than a song—it was a map of everything I was seeing and feeling but didn't yet have words for. The band was multiracial. The lyrics spoke of decay, fear, injustice. Thatcherism had taken hold, and in the private school I attended in outer London, racism was rife.

That song opened something in me. I began writing lyrics, which led to poetry, diaries, stories. Not because I was taught to—but because something inside needed to speak. At school, I was surrounded by a canon that centred dead white men and silenced the world I lived in. But the streets outside—Brixton, New Cross, Tottenham—were alive with voices that resisted, rioted, remembered. I started to write because I needed to make sense of that world."

This kind of storytelling isn't about performance. It's about *positioning*: locating oneself in time, place, power, and language. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher uses autobiographical reflection to invite learners to see their creativity as socially and politically situated.

WRITING THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS A DECOLONISING ACT

When you write about how you came to write, you don't just tell a personal story—you trace your literary, cultural, political inheritance. This can reveal whose stories shaped your imagination, and whose were absent. It can also show how creative writing offered a response: a resistance, a remaking, a recovery.

Autobiography, then, becomes a decolonising practice. Not because it retells the past as a neat origin story, but because it helps

us reckon with how colonial legacies have shaped our education, imagination, and sense of permission to speak. What were you taught was "good" writing? Whose voices were seen as universal, and whose as niche or "ethnic"? Which books changed your life—but weren't on the syllabus?

Autobiographical reflection also allows us to consider how our creativity was shaped *outside* formal education—through music, oral traditions, subcultures, popular media, local languages, and lived contradiction.

BEYOND THE BINARY: MIND, BODY, LAND

Many dominant traditions of literary education separate the intellectual from the embodied, the textual from the ecological. But creative writing—particularly in autobiographical mode—can reintegrate these. As you reflect, you may find that your writing was shaped by physical places (housing estates, coastlines, council estates), weather (heatwaves, storms), or sensations (a voice trembling, a pen gripped in anger).

To acknowledge these aspects is to decolonise not just content, but form. Creative writing allows for a fuller, more holistic mode of thinking—one where body, memory, nature, and spirit are allowed to speak.

DIAGRARTING YOUR STORY

One way the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher supports this integrated reflection is through *diagrarting*: a hybrid practice combining diagramming and art-making. Rather than only writing a linear account, students are invited to draw, sketch, map, annotate, and assemble fragments to explore how their writing identity developed.

As has already been covered in the book, I define *diagrarting* as "theorising and practising new ways of writing and drawing," offering it as a means of thinking through pedagogy visually and reflexively (Gilbert 2024). Diagrarting resists fixed, hierarchical academic structures and opens up new ways of knowing—particularly valuable for creative writers and educators working across disciplines, identities, and learning styles. It's not about neatness or polish, but *exploration*.

TEACHING THROUGH AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Encouraging students to write autobiographically is not about inviting oversharing. It's about helping them reflect on their positionality—what stories they carry, how they were shaped, and what they need to question or reclaim. It creates space for critical literacy and self-understanding, both essential for authentic creative work.

For some, this might be the first time they've been invited to write *as themselves*. For others, it might be a way to see that their existing knowledge—of language, of place, of family—is already rich with meaning.

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES

1. WRITE YOUR CREATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Write a short autobiographical account of how you came to write creatively. Consider:

- The people, places, books, songs, or events that shaped you
- What kinds of writing you were encouraged to produce—and which kinds were discouraged
- What personal, cultural, political, or emotional needs writing met for you

Be honest, specific, and grounded in time and place.

2. DIAGRART YOUR STORY

Instead of—or as well as—writing, create a *diagrart* of your writing journey. Combine images, lines, quotes, memories, emotions, timelines, and maps. Use colour, texture, and movement. You are not illustrating your story—you are exploring it.

Reflect in writing afterwards: What did this process reveal that a linear narrative might not have?

3. YOUR FIRST VOICE

Think back to the first time you felt like your voice mattered. What happened? Who listened—or didn't? Free write or draw from this moment, letting the emotion guide the form.

4. THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Choose a piece of your own writing (poem, story, song, essay) and write the hidden story behind it. What inspired it? What were you *really* trying to say? What part of you was speaking?

5. TEACHING REFLECTION

In your reflective journal, write about how autobiographical writing could support your creative writing learners. What would it offer them? What permissions or risks would it involve? How might you scaffold the process thoughtfully?

CHAPTER 25: FROM DECOLONISING TO STORYTELLING

The work of decolonising creative writing is not only about what we remove from the curriculum, but what we re-centre. At its heart, this work asks us to return to the roots of expression—those ancient, embodied practices of speaking and listening that long pre-date the written word. If decolonising creative writing helps us question whose stories have been privileged, then storytelling helps us reclaim how those stories have always been told. In this next chapter, we turn our attention to storytelling—not as a nostalgic tradition, but as a vital, ongoing, and transformative pedagogical tool. We explore how the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher draws upon oral traditions, collective memory, and imaginative re-tellings to build inclusive, reflective writing spaces.

A STORY AT THE START

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher closes the door softly behind them and doesn't speak for a moment. The class looks up from their notebooks. Silence settles like a shawl.

Then the teacher begins—not with instructions, but with a story.

"This morning, before you arrived, I stood outside and listened. The wind was talking to the trees again. I know it sounds strange, but the trees listened back. The wind is older than all of us—it remembers things. Sometimes it comes from the east with a story of golden afternoons and laughter under open skies. Sometimes it howls from the north, bringing memories of grief, of storms breaking branches, of silence after destruction.

And today, it slipped in through the windows of this classroom. It moved through the empty chairs and whispered: *Tell them everything matters. The good days. The heavy days. The days no one understands you. All of it is the story.*"

The students are quiet, attentive. Something has changed in the room. No one is being told what a story *is*, but they feel its pull.

"Before there were books, there were voices. Before there were screens, there were firesides. We told stories to remember, to imagine, to survive. Every story you write, whether it's true or not,

joins the human thread. So let's begin where we always have—with the telling."

This is how the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher teaches storytelling: not as a genre, but as an inheritance.

THE HUMAN URGE TO TELL STORIES

Storytelling is the foundation of creative writing, yet for most of human history it was not written down. It was embodied, oral, social. It passed between people as gesture, song, whisper, chant, improvisation. In her powerful essay *The Long Form Patriarchs and their Accomplices*, Bernardine Evaristo reminds us that storytelling began in Africa, with women. "Yes, this is how storytelling began," she writes. "In Africa, along with the human race. Imagine early African woman learning how to tell her children stories at bedtime in order to send them to sleep" (Evaristo, 2020).

This reminder undoes the myth of creative writing as a Western literary form. It points us to an African storytelling canon that is ancient but often rendered invisible in curricula, anthologies, and workshops. When we centre oral storytelling and its decolonial significance, we begin to see that writing is only one recent chapter in a much older, deeper narrative tradition.

STORIES AS TOOLS—AND WEAPONS

But storytelling has also been used to colonise. Hampton and DeMartini (2017) write that "there is a long-standing Western tradition of creating and telling stories about other peoples 'histories, societies, and cultural practices." These narratives were not innocent: they enabled European imperial powers to impose their own worldview as truth, while casting non-Western knowledge and experience as fiction, myth, or fantasy.

As Hampton and DeMartini continue, "Rather than 'truth,' Western European stories—like all stories—represent historically and culturally specific ideas, desires, and socio-political and economic interests" (p. 250). To teach storytelling without acknowledging this is to perpetuate the idea that only certain stories are valid, literary, or worthy of preservation.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher does not strip storytelling of its power—but neither do they pretend it is neutral. They teach story as a human compulsion and as a political act. They help students understand whose stories have dominated, and whose have been silenced. They create a classroom where everyone has a right to speak, and where listening is just as important as telling.

STORYTELLING IN THE CLASSROOM

For the Mindful Teacher, storytelling is not confined to a "unit" or "week." It's how learning happens. They begin sessions with short oral stories—folk tales, family anecdotes, fables, dreams—often unfinished, to invite continuation. They encourage students to tell their own stories in forms that make sense to them: through spoken word, image, dialect, soundscape, or silence.

They also use storytelling to destabilise power. What if a well-known fairy tale is retold from the perspective of the landscape? What if a national myth is rewritten by a student who has never seen themselves in it? What if a classroom chair tells the story of the term?

Most importantly, the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher sees storytelling as a *shared* act. Stories become a way to connect, not compete. Every voice contributes to the collective narrative—and each contribution changes what the classroom becomes.

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES

1. THE WIND REMEMBERS

Write your own short opening story for a creative writing class. Imagine the room is empty before students arrive. What enters the space first—the light, the wind, a memory, an old song? What does it say? What story does it carry?

2. STORY BEGINNINGS

In your creative reflective journal, respond to: *What are the first stories I remember?* Who told them? What did they make you feel? What did they teach you about the world—and about yourself?

3. CRITICAL STORY REFLECTION

Think back to a story—written, spoken, or watched—that shaped your view of a group of people, place, or culture. In hindsight, what stereotypes did it reinforce? Whose perspective was missing? How would you rewrite or answer it?

4. YOUR STORY TOLD DIFFERENTLY

Choose a personal experience and rewrite it from a different perspective: the friend who was with you, a stranger who passed by, the room you were in. How does the meaning change?

5. TEACHING AS STORYTELLING

Reflect on a recent class or workshop you led. Rewrite it as a short story, beginning with "Once there was a teacher who…" Let metaphor and invention in. What role did you play? What role did your students play? What would the classroom furniture say about the lesson?

CHAPTER 26: BEYOND THE WORKSHOP

POEM: THE WORKSHOP REWRITTEN

The desk was set, the circle tight,
We took our place, we dimmed the light.
"Read your piece," the tutor said,
"And then we'll mark what's wrong instead."

But one day, someone flipped the script.
We read a tale that laughed and slipped
Between our hearts and sharpened minds—
A story leaving rules behind.

Then came our turn to answer back:
With riffs and dreams, with rage and crack.
No fix-it tips, no boxed technique—
Just voices speaking what they seek.

TEACHING WRITING AFTER IOWA: NEW FRAMEWORKS, OLD QUESTIONS

Kate Kostelnik's (2014) critique of the "Iowa Creative Writing Workshop" model is not a rejection of peer feedback or drafting, but a challenge to its rigidity, its centring of polished product over exploratory process, and its tendency to silence difference. She offers a vision of the creative writing classroom as a site of cultural encounter, personal inquiry, and agency-building—one that resonates strongly with the ethos of *The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher*.

Kostelnik invites us to:

- Use image prompts and unexpected texts to challenge the "write what you know" orthodoxy.
- Ask provocative questions about audience, diversity, and perspective.
- Treat the writing process itself as a topic of discussion and reflection.
- Shift feedback away from prescriptive "fixing" and toward open-ended questions that promote autonomy.

Paulo Freire (2014) deepens this approach by collapsing the artificial division between reading and writing. To read is to prepare to write; to write is to make meaning out of what has been read. Both are forms of critical thinking. Meanwhile, Michael Rosen (2013) encourages us to resist over-structured genre instruction and instead begin with meaningful, resonant texts—letting story lead the way toward technique, rather than the reverse.

The result is a radically different vision of the workshop: not as a place of correction, but of connection. Not a masterclass, but a meeting place.

CASE STUDY 1: THE UNMINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – L.B.

L.B. teaches creative writing to undergraduates in an economically deprived urban area. She is well-versed in the Iowa method and proud of her "rigorous standards." Each session follows the same format: students submit pieces a week in advance, the class discusses them without the author speaking, then the author gets a short moment to respond.

Students are asked to avoid "writing outside their experience" unless they can "justify it" and are warned not to be "overly emotional." L.B. prioritises line-level technique—"tightening prose," "killing darlings," "cutting adjectives." She rarely asks about process or intention.

Over time, the workshop becomes clinical. Students learn to mimic "good writing" but struggle to find their voices. A working-class student from a nearby estate drops out, saying: "I couldn't write about where I'm from. It wasn't literary enough."

L.B. defends the structure as "professionalising," but rarely reflects on who gets to be considered professional—or what is lost when process is reduced to product.

CASE STUDY 2: THE MINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – J.M.

J.M. teaches in a small-town sixth form college. She begins each term not with an icebreaker, but with a provocation: "What do you

wish someone would write about?" The room goes quiet—then floods with answers: loneliness, injustice, fandoms, grief.

In week two, she distributes anonymous portraits clipped from magazines. "Choose one," she says, "and imagine their voice." Students read excerpts from Sandra Cisneros, Bernardine Evaristo, and Jason Reynolds before writing. They discuss who gets to tell stories, and why.

When it's time to share drafts, J.M. encourages metanarratives: students explain how the piece came to be. Peer responses must include one question about the process, not just the product. If students feel stuck, they reflect on what stopped them—not just what didn't work.

J.M. draws on Freire and Rosen: they read a story before breaking it apart. Then they write back to it. The room feels alive with both text and talk. By the end of term, her students are not just writing stories—they are questioning what stories do in the world.

READING AND WRITING AS ONE ACT

Freire's (2014) insistence that reading and writing are not separate skills but intertwined acts of knowing should be central to any creative writing pedagogy. When we encourage students to read not just analytically but *creatively*—to read like writers and write like readers—we foster deeper engagement, greater confidence, and more nuanced expression.

The United Kingdom's National Literacy Trust's resources (2025) echo this: story is a bridge between emotional experience and linguistic skill. Writing that responds to reading, especially when grounded in real-world issues or diverse narratives, is more likely to feel meaningful. Creative reading begets creative writing.

And Rosen (2013) reminds us that story is not simply "genre"—it's how humans bind feeling to thought. The moment we rank stories lower than essays, or replace meaning with mechanics, we risk severing that vital link.

FINAL THOUGHT

The *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* does not discard workshops, genres, or skills. But they use them as tools, not templates. They create spaces where students read and write as one continuous act of meaning-making—starting not with rules, but with real stories and real questions.

They do not ask, "How can we fix this?" They ask, "What is this trying to become?"

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM: READING LIKE A WRITER, WRITING LIKE A READER

They gave us words to study—tight,
With metaphors that shone just right.
We underlined. We parsed. We learned
Where commas live and darlings burned.
But no one said, "What's underneath?
What haunts the line, what breathes beneath?"
Then someone passed a page around—
Not perfect, but it pulsed with sound.
We read aloud, and then we wrote.
The text became a little boat.
It carried us to other shores
Where stories weren't just theirs—but ours.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- Reflect on your current approach to workshops. Do your students feel free to explore, or are they writing to be "correct"?
- Do you encourage students to reflect on their process—not just their product? How might you incorporate this more fully?
- Have you ever seen a piece of feedback shut a student down? What alternative might have invited further writing instead?

- How often do you invite students to *read creatively*—to respond to texts with their own work rather than just analyse it?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Write a short creative piece inspired by an image (a photo, artwork, or portrait). Afterwards, reflect: What did the image open up in your imagination that "write what you know" might not have?
- Take a story, poem, or passage you love and write a letter to its author, asking questions about *how* it was written. Now, imagine the author replies—what do they say?
- Write about a time you were told you weren't a "good writer." How did that shape your relationship with creativity?
- Begin with: *The workshop they gave me was…* and use metaphor or story to describe how that space felt.

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- In Kostelnik's terms, what happens when workshops centre fixing over reflecting? What are the pedagogical risks and missed opportunities?
- Freire argues that reading and writing are not distinct acts but parts of the same knowledge process. How might this idea reshape your lesson planning?
- Rosen suggests that creativity is often stifled by starting with technique. Could we start with meaning, emotion, and story instead? What does that look like in practice?
- Discuss what a "mindful" feedback culture looks like in your own context. What would need to shift?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Try Kostelnik's image-based exercise: give each student a different anonymous portrait or artwork. Use these as springboards for developing point of view and voice.
- Instead of standard peer feedback, try a metacognitive exchange: writers include a paragraph about how the piece

came to be; responders ask questions about the writer's process.

- In your next lesson, begin with a powerful story, poem, or spoken word piece. Don't analyse it first—just listen or read. Then invite students to write *back to it*.
- Integrate Literacy Trust strategies: create themed reading-writing sessions where students write in response to real-world texts, news stories, or children's literature that reflects diverse identities and issues.

A MINDFUL PROMPT

Before your next workshop, take a moment to reflect: Am I listening for what the writing means, or only for how it works? Can I read with empathy as well as analysis?

CHAPTER 27: RADICAL READING, RADICAL WRITING

YA Fiction, Social Justice, and Creative Pedagogy

POEM: SHELF LIFE

I found a book with teeth and flame
Tucked on a dusty, bottom shelf.
It didn't ask me to behave—
It asked me to become myself.

It questioned who gets heard and how,
Why some must climb while others fly.
It whispered rage beneath the rhyme,
And didn't need to tell me why.

Now in my classroom, books arrive
With girls who run and boys who cry—
With ghosts who riot, queens who build,
With futures that refuse to die.

READING AS REVOLUTION: WHY TEACHERS MUST READ WIDELY, RADICALLY, AND RESPONSIVELY

The research from *Research Rich Pedagogies* (Cremin et al. 2025) offers a transformative provocation: teachers who read widely and aesthetically—not just analytically—are more likely to create learning environments where children and young people find reading (and by extension writing) *pleasurable*, empowering, and socially engaged.

Reynolds (2007) explores how children's and YA literature can provoke the ultimate question of childhood: *Why?*—Why are things this way, and why can't they be different? Through texts that challenge dominant norms, radical children's literature fosters the imagination as a political act.

This matters deeply to the *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher*, who reads not only for technique but for transformation—of self, of pedagogy, and of society. They understand that creative writing is

not simply about developing personal voice, but also about naming the world, questioning it, and remaking it.

CASE STUDY 1: THE UNMINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – C.S.

C.S. teaches English in a high-achieving grammar school. Their creative writing unit is tightly structured around a "narrative bootcamp," focusing on exposition, climax, and resolution. As part of the unit, students study *Of Mice and Men*—Steinbeck's 1937 novella about two itinerant workers whose fragile dream of owning land is destroyed by the systemic forces of poverty, prejudice, and violence.

C.S. does cover key themes such as loneliness, friendship, disability, and injustice, and students explore literary techniques like foreshadowing, symbolism, and character development. However, the teaching stops at the text. There is little space to connect Steinbeck's portrayal of power and marginalisation to students' contemporary contexts, or to explore how similar dynamics of exclusion and struggle persist today.

When one student writes a story about a queer teenager facing discrimination in a modern town, C.S. comments, "This is brave, but let's stick with something more relatable." Another student begins a story inspired by their experiences as a carer, but is advised to choose "a clearer structure." The feedback often focuses on whether the writing matches established models, not what it reveals or questions.

Here, students are encouraged to master form but not to interrogate meaning. Their writing is guided by safety and conformity, rather than curiosity and courage. The curriculum is polished, but ideologically closed. Creative writing becomes an exercise in control, not exploration.

CASE STUDY 2: THE MINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – R.A.

R.A. teaches in an inner-city comprehensive. Their creative writing scheme begins with *The Hate U Give*, Angie Thomas's

acclaimed YA novel in which sixteen-year-old Starr Carter witnesses the police shooting of her childhood friend and becomes an activist. The novel explores racial injustice, community, and voice, offering students a powerful example of first-person narration as political expression.

Students respond with journals, blackout poetry, monologues from minor characters, and letters to authors and activists. R.A. draws attention to voice, power, and social justice through creative exercises and critical questioning: Who gets to speak? Who is silenced? What does it mean to write for change?

Reading and writing become reciprocal. Creative expression is a way of thinking critically and acting ethically. Students begin to understand that literature isn't just made of technique—it's made of truth.

Discussions are rich with questions: Who gets to speak? Who gets silenced? How does this story connect to stop-and-search in our neighbourhood? Students make zines about community power, compose flash fiction inspired by protests, and write alternative endings.

R.A. introduces Hollindale's (1988) levels of ideology. Students reflect on *explicit*, *implicit*, and *cultural* messages in the stories they read and write. They see literature as both mirror and window.

Citizenship work is embedded, drawing on resources from Young Citizens. One student writes a script about online racism and performs it in assembly. Another pens a comic about climate change activism. R.A. doesn't just teach creative writing—they teach *writing the world anew*.

WRITING IN THE WILD ZONE

Reynolds (2007) and Janelle Adsit (2017) describe children's and YA literature—and the writing it inspires—as a "wild zone" where the ordinary rules are suspended. Here, readers and writers try on new ideas, rehearse resistance, and imagine radical alternatives.

Rosenblatt (1978) supports this by foregrounding the aesthetic, subjective response: how we read is shaped by who we are, and creative writing begins in this deeply personal, relational space.

Texts are never neutral. As Janks (2010) reminds us, they have *designs on us*. The *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* asks not just how stories are structured, but what they do—and for whom.

Reading and writing become reciprocal, iterative, political. When students see themselves in books, or write themselves into being, they are not just learning literacy. They are claiming citizenship.

FINAL THOUGHT

To read radically is to write radically. And to teach creatively in a world that silences, marginalises, and forgets, is to act as an accomplice in the making of new futures.

The *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* reads widely, questions deeply, and teaches boldly—because the shelf isn't just where books live. It's where power sits. And it's where the next revolution might begin.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM: READING, THEN WRITING

I read a story that rewrote me—
Its voice a thread, its fire a key.
It didn't ask if I could spell—
It asked if I could fight as well.

It showed me truths I hadn't seen,
Of what it means to dare, or dream.
Now every book I hand across
Might start a riot. Or break a cross.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- What children's or YA books have stayed with you? Why? How might they speak differently to your students today?
- What kinds of books are absent in your current curriculum? Whose voices, identities, or experiences are not represented?
- In your own teaching, do you prioritise readerly pleasure, emotional response, or critical thinking? How might you better balance these?

- How does your creative writing teaching help students become *critical* readers and writers—not just skilled ones?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Think of a YA novel you've recently read. Write a short piece from the perspective of a minor or silenced character.
- Draft a "response text" to a powerful scene in a YA novel. It can mirror, challenge, extend, or subvert the original moment.
- Reflect in prose or poetry on a book that made you ask, "Why are things this way?" or "What if they were different?"
- Write a flash fiction story based on a moral dilemma raised by a children's or YA book. Add a brief reflection on why it matters now.

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- Discuss Reynolds 'idea that radical children's literature provokes the question "Why?" How does this align with your vision of creative writing education?
- Examine Hollindale's three levels of ideology in a familiar YA novel. What is said? What is assumed? What aligns with the dominant culture?
- How do you think Rosenblatt's aesthetic reading approach complements creative writing pedagogy? How does it contrast with technique-first approaches?
- Discuss what a radical, culturally relevant curriculum might look like in your setting. What would be required of you, your texts, your institution?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Integrate reader response and ideological reflection into your creative writing sessions. Use questions like: *What values does this story promote? Who speaks and who is silent?*
- Build writing sequences that pair YA fiction with critical citizenship work (e.g., write stories that explore identity, justice, or activism). Use Young Citizens resources to scaffold inquiry.

- Use Rosen's approach: begin with a powerful story, invite emotional and imaginative responses, then analyse the techniques. Let meaning come before mechanics.
- Select one powerful children's or YA book and plan a short scheme of work combining reading, discussion, writing, and action. Ask: *What might this text help us change?*

A MINDFUL PROMPT

Before choosing your next classroom text, pause. Ask: What questions does this story provoke? Who might feel seen? Who might feel erased? Am I offering books that open the world—or just ones that decorate it?

SECTION 5: VOICE, IDENTITY, AND MOTIVATION

Writing is personal. These chapters explore how identity shapes voice—and how voice shapes motivation. Drawing on student narratives, reflective practices, and inclusive pedagogies, this section helps you support students in writing who they are as well as what they know.

CHAPTER 28: TEACHING CREATIVE WRITING DIALOGICALLY

POEM: IN THE SPACE BETWEEN WORDS

In the space between words, teenagers lean in— a photograph of shouting adults held at the centre of the room: two mouths open in fury, hands caught mid-gesture, the stillness electric.

Some students look away— too close to home, too loud without sound. One sees a parent's face in the blur, another recalls a slammed door. But here, now, it is safe. They breathe into the discomfort, translate tension into verse.

They speak not to judge, but to explore— what it stirred, what it mirrored, what it taught.

One poem rewrites the moment as forgiveness, another dreams escape. In their dialogue, they sift feeling from image, fear from fact, finding words for what had no name.

No marks, no right answers— only learning stitched into listening, curiosity as compass, response as respect.

TEACHING CREATIVE WRITING DIALOGICALLY

The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher began with a stern face and a checklist. The class of fifteen-year-olds sat stiffly, poems printed in neat fonts, trembling slightly in their folders. On the board, the instructions were clear: Read your poem. Evaluate your partner's work. Give it a mark out of ten. Use the success criteria.

They handed out a photograph—two people mid-argument, frozen in a moment of raw confrontation. "Write what you see. Then share. Then judge."

There was no time to dwell, to imagine, to discuss. The teacher, watching the clock, urged them on: "You've got twenty minutes. Focus. Keep it quiet."

Some students hesitated. Others copied lines from earlier drafts. A few stared at the photo with unease, the subject matter too raw, too close to memories they'd rather forget.

One student leaned towards a classmate, but the teacher shook their head: "No talking yet—save your comments for the mark sheet."

The silence grew taut. Voices stayed low, uncertain. One student muttered, "It was okay... I gave you a seven."

Another crossed out a line under pressure, whispering, "My metaphor didn't even make sense."

What might have become a dialogue—tentative, vulnerable, brave—was stifled. There was no time to unpack feeling, no space to soften the edge of judgement. The room grew quieter. Fewer poems were shared aloud. Fewer eyes met.

The photograph on the desk became more of a test than an invitation. A provocation with no scaffold. Dialogue was shut down by the rush, by the fear of too much noise, by the risk of going off-script. What might have been a mindful inquiry into imagination and memory became a box-ticking exercise—efficient, contained, and quietly dispiriting.

In a different classroom down the hall, the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher sat in a circle with their students. The same photograph lay in the centre, but this time it wasn't about right answers. It was about noticing. Feeling. Imagining.

They began by asking, not telling. "What stories might this photo hold? What's going on here, beyond what we see?"

Students wrote in silence, then shared aloud. One poem described the silence after the argument. Another imagined the photograph from the viewpoint of a bystander. A third wrote in the voice of the unseen child in the background.

Then came the questions—not from the teacher, but from the students.

"Why did you choose that voice?" "How do you want the reader to feel?" "Could this have been a dream instead of a memory?"

The teacher listened, nodding. They guided the group gently to use Robert Fisher's question quadrant: Which of these are closed questions? Which open enquiry? Could any be expanded?

They were careful not to rush. Their presence was calm, open. When a student stumbled in explanation, they waited, gently encouraging: "Take your time—what you're saying matters." When a particularly brave or personal poem was read, they offered quiet gratitude: "Thank you for trusting us with that."

Their voice modelled gentleness; their responses opened space rather than closing it. They asked, "What surprised you in your own writing?" and "Where might this piece want to go next?"

One student reflected, "I asked if the poem was about the photo. But maybe the better question is: what else could this poem be about?"

Laughter and insight began to mingle. They weren't evaluating—they were investigating. They weren't assigning marks—they were discovering meaning. As Fisher (2011) suggests, the power of learning emerges when students are given the space to generate and explore their own questions.

The teacher moved slowly around the room, crouching beside students rather than towering above. They offered reflections as questions rather than corrections. "What do you think would happen if the last stanza came first?" "How might this poem feel if it were written as a dialogue?"

They were not only modelling enquiry, but embodying compassion. Their mindful presence made room for vulnerability, for complexity, for hesitation. They understood that writing is not merely a product to be judged, but a process to be nurtured.

In that moment, the creative writing classroom became a place of mindful dialogue. Each question asked with care. Each poem received with curiosity. Compassion hung in the air like morning mist. The act of writing became inseparable from the act of talking and thinking and feeling together—held not in criticism, but in kindness.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Poem for Reflection: *In the Space Between Words* (see above)

CREATIVE REFLECTIONS FOR TEACHERS

Think back to a time when you had a truly fruitful conversation about a piece of writing—your own or someone else's. What were the conditions that allowed that dialogue to flourish? Was there time to reflect? A sense of mutual respect? A genuine question that sparked something deeper?

Now remember a time when a conversation about writing fell flat or left you or the other person deflated. What made it unproductive? Was it rushed? Judgemental? Too focused on evaluation and not enough on exploration?

Reflect in writing on both experiences. Write them as scenes, memories, or even inner monologues. What do these experiences teach you about how you might create space for dialogue in your own classroom? How could you invite the kinds of questions that open, rather than close, a conversation? How might you shift from evaluation to enquiry, from certainty to curiosity?

Consider experimenting with dialogue as a form of reflection. Write a fictionalised—or partly true—exchange between a teacher and student that captures a moment of discovery, or of misunderstanding, or of care. Let yourself explore the tone and texture of how we talk about writing. Where does tension arise? Where does understanding grow?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Write a short poem or prose piece about a photograph. Then generate five open questions about your piece.
- Rewrite your piece based on one of the questions.

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- Read a peer's piece aloud and collaboratively generate open questions about it.
- Use Fisher's quadrant model to analyse the questions created. Which sparked the most interesting conversations?

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

- Try a weekly Question Circle in your creative writing class. Use a piece of student work as the centrepiece and generate only open-ended, non-evaluative questions about it.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Take five minutes to breathe deeply and reflect before giving feedback. What assumptions are you bringing? What might you learn by simply listening?

CHAPTER 29: WRITING THE ROW:

IDENTITY, POWER, AND DEMOCRATIC CONFLICT IN CREATIVE WRITING CLASSROOMS

OPENING NARRATIVE: THE LOUDEST ONE

In the workshop, they argued.

Not over commas or character arcs, but over whether a character's queerness was "realistic," whether the poem about knives was "too angry," whether the teacher's example story—about a nice family picnic—was the kind of thing anyone here had ever lived.

At one point, K. stood up and shouted, "You don't know what it's like to have to translate yourself just to be heard!" Another student started crying. The teacher took a breath.

Someone muttered, "This is too much."

And someone else said, "Maybe this is exactly what it needs to be."

IDENTITY, HEGEMONY, AND THE ROW WE NEED TO HEAR

Stuart Hall's (Hall & Back 2009) reflections on identity as a constructed, shifting, and political phenomenon have deep implications for the creative writing classroom. Hall's view that identity is *made*—through culture, history, and struggle—invites us to see creative writing as a site of that making. For Hall, a genuinely democratic space is not a consensus-driven circle—it is a site of negotiation, tension, even open conflict. As he famously stated, the "sound of democracy" is the sound of people refusing to line up behind a single banner.

The *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* embraces this sound. They do not seek peace for its own sake, but truth. They do not ask students to "tone it down" or "make it relatable." Instead, they support students in writing through discomfort, contradiction, and complexity—especially around race, gender, sexuality, and power.

This chapter considers what happens when the creative writing classroom becomes a space for *argument*, not aggression, and for identity-formation as a communal, contested act.

CASE STUDY 1: THE UNMINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – K.W.

K.W. teaches in a multicultural sixth form in a suburban setting. She believes in inclusivity and politeness, and begins each session with group agreements: be kind, don't interrupt, assume good intentions.

When a student writes a spoken word piece challenging the school's Eurocentric curriculum and comparing its silence on colonialism to violence, K.W. smiles and says, "Powerful! But maybe choose a less confrontational metaphor." When two students debate the poem's message, she cuts the discussion short: "Let's stay positive."

Later, when another student submits a short story featuring anti-racist protest, she reminds them to "keep politics out of fiction."

K.W.'s classroom is peaceful, but muted. Difference is acknowledged, but not interrogated. Conflict is avoided, not engaged. The classroom remains civil—but unchanged.

CASE STUDY 2: THE MINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – J.N.

J.N. teaches spoken word and storytelling at a college in an economically deprived inner-city area. They open the first session by sharing a poem about being a non-binary writer of colour in publishing. "I want to hear your truths," they say, "especially if they're hard to hear."

The classroom becomes a dynamic space: poems about trans joy and transphobia, monologues about diasporic guilt, dialogues about masculinity, mental health, and police violence. Sometimes students clash—over religion, over pronouns, over what art should be allowed to say. But J.N. facilitates with trust and clarity: "We're not here to agree. We're here to write what's true. And that means listening, too."

They use work from Merky Books and authors like Derek Owusu to provoke discussion. They invite students to write about moments they were silenced. Students compose group poems that hold opposing views in tension.

For J.N., the democratic classroom isn't quiet. It's honest.

CREATIVE WRITING AS A DEMOCRATIC ENCOUNTER

J. Johnson's (2010) reflection on masculinity and homophobia in the Los Angeles spoken word scene shows that even within radical spaces, cultural hierarchies persist. His account reminds us that simply inviting diverse voices isn't enough—we must also be willing to challenge the power dynamics within our creative communities.

The *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* recognises that conflict is part of growth. They create classrooms that welcome disagreement—not to inflame, but to deepen learning. They design lessons that raise big questions: Who gets to speak? Whose stories are legible? What happens when voices collide?

They use writing not just as expression, but as dialogue. Not just as product, but as political process.

FINAL THOUGHT

To teach creative writing as a democratic practice is to risk discomfort. It is to hold space for the noise, the row, the truth that isn't tidy. It is to trust that something valuable emerges—not from consensus, but from courageous writing and listening.

The *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* knows that a quiet classroom isn't always a safe one. Sometimes, the most radical thing they can do is let the argument unfold—and make sure no one is erased in the process.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

NARRATIVE PROMPT: THE ARGUMENT

Two students sit across from each other in workshop. One says, "Your poem made me uncomfortable." The other says, "Good."

What does the teacher do next? What would *you* do?

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- Do you feel comfortable with conflict in your classroom? Why or why not?
- When have you experienced disagreement or discomfort as productive in a learning space? When was it destructive? What made the difference?
- How do your classroom "ground rules" encourage or inhibit genuine expression, particularly around identity and injustice?
- What does Stuart Hall's idea of democracy as ongoing "row" mean for how you run discussions or give feedback?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Write a dialogue (or polyphonic poem) between two parts of your own identity that have been in tension: cultural, sexual, familial, political.
- Create a piece that starts in harmony but is interrupted by disagreement. Let the disagreement reshape the form of the piece.
- Write a character who refuses to "line up behind the banner" of a group they care about. What is at stake?
- Reflect in writing on a moment when someone misread or misunderstood your identity. What would you say to them now?

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- Read Hall's quotation about democracy being a "bloody-unending row." Do you agree that this kind of messiness is necessary in a learning space? Why or why not?
- Discuss J. Johnson's struggle with masculinity and activism in spoken word poetry. Can you relate to his tension between loyalty and critique?
- What might a creative writing curriculum look like if it truly welcomed conflict and discomfort as part of its pedagogy?

- How do publishers like Merky Books shift the landscape of inclusion? How can you incorporate work by writers like Derek Owusu in your own teaching?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- **Develop a Writing and Power unit**: focus on identity, hegemony, and voice. Use contemporary texts that challenge dominant narratives.
- **Invite oppositional readings**: when analysing a text or student work, ask: Who might disagree with this? Why? How can we explore that respectfully?
- **Use student-generated ground rules** that include statements like: "We welcome challenge." "We listen without defensiveness." "We make space for tension."
- **Incorporate work by activist publishers**: Use books, interviews, and social media from Merky Books or Knights Of as contemporary case studies.
- **Assign a 'Voice and Silence 'writing project**: Ask students to write about when they felt heard—and when they didn't. Invite a creative response to both.

A MINDFUL PROMPT

Before your next class, ask: Am I creating conditions for comfort, or for truth? What would it look like to make space not just for agreement, but for disagreement rooted in respect, love, and change?

CHAPTER 30: WRITING AS HEALING, WRITING AS LISTENING

BECOMING THE DEEP LISTENER

A STORY AT THE START

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher begins with a quiet story.

"A teenage patient in a cancer ward once wrote about finding a dragon's egg. The story sparkled with surprise and joy, even as it touched loss. He imagined caring for the dragon, letting it fly, saying goodbye. I remember the stillness in the room when he read it aloud.

He passed away not long after. But in the act of writing, he had already taken flight. He'd listened deeply to something inside himself and returned with a story that made sense of the world."

The teacher pauses, then continues:

"That's what we'll do today. Not write for performance. Not to prove anything. But to listen deeply—and see what we find."

WRITING AS DEEP LISTENING

In *Write Yourself*, Gillie Bolton invites us to think of writing not as performing, nor even expressing, but as a kind of **deep listening**. To write therapeutically is to attend to the parts of the self that everyday life quiets or hides. It is to sit still enough with the pen in your hand that something previously unspoken has space to emerge.

Bolton's metaphor for the writer's role is that of the shaman—but here, we shift it to the **Deep Listener**: one who journeys inward, who dares to face discomfort or uncertainty, and who returns with insight, compassion, or simply a better question. The Deep Listener is not guided by external praise or product, but by attentiveness to the self, the body, memory, and emotion.

This is writing as a process of discovery—what Bolton calls "breaking the skin of the pool of yourself." It is non-linear, sometimes strange, and often surprising. You do not begin knowing what you will find. But you write because you want to find it.

DEEP LISTENING VS. LITERARY PRODUCTION

The Deep Listener does not write to impress. They write to encounter. This is very different from much of the writing we are taught to value in schools, universities, and publishing cultures—where clarity, structure, and outcome are paramount. Bolton's approach resists that. She emphasises writing as process: first the uncensored "dash onto the page," then quiet rereading, then—only if ready—sharing with a trusted other.

This three-part cycle—**writing, reflection, sharing**—makes space for transformation. It allows us to meet ourselves on the page, then decide what, if anything, we want others to see. Writing becomes a dialogue, first with the self, then with the world.

BOLTON VS. MILLS: DIFFERENT JOURNEYS

Paul Mills, in *The Routledge Creative Writing Coursebook* (2006), focuses on the technical and formal aspects of writing—genre, structure, technique, revision. His goal is to equip writers for publication and creative mastery.

Bolton, by contrast, encourages writing that may never be shared. Her exercises often involve memory, trauma, identity, metaphor, dreams. She values depth over polish. Where Mills asks: "How can this work better?" Bolton asks: "What do you need to hear yourself say?"

Both approaches have value. And in truth, they are not as far apart as they might first appear. Mills also encourages exploration, play, and reflection—just as Bolton recognises that crafting a poem or story can be deeply therapeutic.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher integrates both: encouraging learners to use writing as a tool for both craft and self-discovery, recognising that these are not opposing aims. The Deep Listener and the Skilled Writer can be the same person.

DEEP LISTENING AS A DECOLONISING PRACTICE

Can Bolton's work be described as decolonising? Not explicitly. Her focus is on the therapeutic and reflective power of writing, and she does not directly address the cultural, racial, or historical contexts that shape which stories get heard or valued.

However, her emphasis on *inner authority*, *process over product*, and *the writer as the primary reader* aligns with many decolonial goals. She challenges the idea that writing must conform to external norms of "goodness" to matter. She opens space for multiple voices, forms, and truths—including those long silenced.

The Deep Listener, then, is a model not just for healing, but for justice. By paying attention to the self in its complexity, they become more able to listen to others—with care, humility, and awareness of power.

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES

1. WRITING AS LISTENING

Set a timer for 10 minutes. Begin with: *"What I need to hear right now is…"* Let your pen move without judgment. You are not writing *for* anyone. You are listening to yourself.

2. WHO ARE YOUR WRITING MODELS?

Reflect in your journal: Have you been taught to write as a performer or as a listener? Which model dominates in your experience of teaching or learning writing? What does your writing self need more of?

3. THE DESCENT AND THE RETURN

Write a symbolic story in which you descend into a mysterious place (a cave, a forest, a dream, a basement). You find something there. What is it? How do you bring it back? What changes?

4. DEEP LISTENING AND THE CLASSROOM

Write a short reflection: How can you support your students in becoming deep listeners through writing? What rituals, scaffolds, or permissions might you offer?

5. COMPARING BOLTON AND MILLS

Write a paragraph comparing these two approaches:

- Which do you find more aligned with your teaching values?
- Can they be reconciled?
- What might a synthesis of both look like in your classroom?

CHAPTER 31: TEACHING COURAGEOUSLY

CREATIVITY, CONNECTION, AND THE PERSONAL VOICE

POEM: WORKSHOP

She read the rubric, typed a line,
Then backspaced it away.
"The brief says 'use a metaphor,'
Not 'grieve your mum today.'"

He skimmed her page, eyes flat with rules,
Then ticked in margin red:
"Avoid the passive voice," he scrawled—
But missed what it had said.

Another class. A different room.
No desks, just scattered chairs.
"Write what you feel," the tutor said.
"We'll start with who still cares."

A boy wrote storms inside his chest.
A girl brought in her song.
The tutor nodded, shared her draft—
Half-formed, but fierce and strong.
This was the lab of light and dark,
Where rules met feeling's fire.
A Mindful Creative Writing Teacher
Lit the page. Then stepped aside.

THE MINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER IN PRACTICE

What does it mean to *teach* creative writing mindfully? It begins with more than techniques or exercises. It starts with a disposition—an attention to presence, context, community, and voice.

In a Year 9 classroom in Leeds, Ms. A draws a chalk spiral on the floor. Her students gather around it in socks. "We're going to write about a memory," she says, "but not to explain it. Just walk back into it." She reads aloud a sensory paragraph of her own—about peeling wallpaper, the burnt sugar smell of Diwali sweets, her father's voice from behind a closed door. Then she invites silence. A boy begins to write about a hospital corridor. A girl sketches a comic strip about running away. There's no standardised outcome, but everyone is writing.

In contrast, another classroom nearby is quiet in a different way. Mr. B has projected a checklist: Use at least two similes. Include one flashback. His students write with heads down and frowns on their faces. They look up not to ask questions but to check they've "done it right." The only writing that earns praise is grammatically correct and stylistically controlled. Risk is subtly punished. Vulnerability is ignored.

This contrast lies at the heart of *The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher*'s approach.

Drawing on Cropley (2001), the *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* nurtures creativity through independence, dialogue, boldness, resilience, and self-reflection. They reward courage as much as correctness. They know that creativity lives not only in

products but in processes—in how students come to trust themselves on the page.

CREATIVITY AS RISK AND RELATIONSHIP

A core tenet of *The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* is relationality: writing grows when writers feel seen. A college tutor begins each semester with a simple question: "What's a story you haven't yet been allowed to tell?" There are tears, laughter, long silences. One mature student eventually brings a piece about her son's wrongful arrest. "This is not an assignment," she says. "This is me." Her tutor invites a peer group response based not on assessment criteria, but on two prompts: *What moved you? What stayed with you?*

This shift—from evaluation to resonance—transforms the space. It teaches students to listen deeply, and to see writing as a form of relation, not simply self-expression.

MOTIVATION, MYTH, AND THE MFA/MA IN CREATIVE WRITING

We have already looked at the many reasons why creative writing is taught—a question explored in depth in *Why Teach Creative Writing?* But it is not a question with a single answer. Rather, it's one *Mindful Creative Writing Teachers* return to again and again. The purposes of teaching creative writing shift with the context: to offer healing, to amplify unheard voices, to provide professional accreditation, to build communities of resistance and play. In every new room and with every new group of students, the answer must be asked afresh.

Childress et al. (2015) argue that creative writing degrees serve to signal a writer's identity and affiliation with a literary field. Jaillant (2016) critiques this function, showing that Malcolm Bradbury's famed MA at UEA operated less as a school of writing and more as a network of cultural capital. The craft came second. For the *Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher*, this is troubling: it turns writing into a commodity and learning into a game of access.

But the *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* sees something else. Bradbury, knowingly or not, created a community. And as Cremin

et al. (2005) argue, it is *only* when we build communities of writers that we truly teach writing.

That's the premise behind Paper Nations (2021), too: to connect young writers into circles of creative fellowship, to foster mutual recognition, support, and the slow growth of voice. Whether in universities or youth centres, this model offers a mindful, open-ended purpose for studying creative writing.

PERSONAL NARRATIVE: THE SELF ON THE PAGE

Mills (2006) foregrounds personal narrative as a powerful pedagogical tool. Writing about the self can heal, unsettle, illuminate, provoke. For Mills, the most powerful personal narratives are not necessarily neat or conventional. Writers like Berger and Plath break stylistic rules yet draw readers into urgent, authentic experiences.

The *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* allows for this. They model openness, share their own imperfect drafts, and invite students to explore memory, identity, trauma, joy. One sixth-form teacher invites students to write about a "threshold moment." Responses include: the first time being called a slur, the moment a sibling was born, the day a parent left. There are tears again—but this time they're held gently.

Unmindful teaching too often reduces personal writing to a formula: "use the five senses," "include a turning point." These are helpful scaffolds—but they become cages when applied rigidly.

TEACHING AS PRACTICE, NOT PERFORMANCE

Thomson (2013) critiques the idea that great writers make great teachers. Many do not. The *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* acknowledges this: writing is a skill, but teaching is a practice. It requires reflection, humility, and a willingness to unlearn. The mindful teacher studies pedagogy as seriously as craft. They think about what it *feels* like to be in their classroom, and how the power dynamics in a workshop can foster—or crush—a voice.

They ask not only, "What are we writing?" but "Who are we becoming as we write?"

The *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* does not offer simple rules or perfect models. Instead, they build trust, welcome failure, and centre the writer's presence. They teach creativity as a way of being—not just a means to a grade, a book deal, or a prize.

To teach writing mindfully is to teach courageously.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM: THE REDRAFT

What if it's not a final draft—
But just a breath between?
Not polish but a pulse we hear
Between the lines unseen?

What if the work of teaching words
Is mostly listening deep—
To stories buried, bold, or bruised,
That wake us from our sleep?

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- What are your current reasons for teaching creative writing? How do these reasons change depending on who you are teaching?
- Recall a time you were taught creatively and mindfully. What made that experience feel different or empowering?
- Reflect on Cropley's (2001) list of traits shared by teachers who promote creativity. Which of these do you practise consciously? Which might you wish to develop further?
- In what ways does your teaching encourage risk-taking in writing? In what ways might it unintentionally inhibit it?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Write a brief personal narrative about a moment when your voice felt silenced—or truly heard—in an educational setting.
- Write a character sketch of a fictional *unmindful* teacher and then reimagine them as a *mindful* one. What shifts?

- Begin with the line: *The first time I was told I was wrong, I...* and see where it leads.
- Choose one of the following themes and write for ten minutes: **Threshold**, **Echo**, **Unspoken**, **Redraft**.

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- Discuss Mills '(2006) argument that great personal narratives don't always follow formal rules. What are the implications for assessment?
- How do we balance freedom and structure in a writing classroom? What does a mindful balance look like in practice?
- In light of Jaillant (2016), what do you think the purpose of university-level creative writing degrees *should* be? Should networking and access to cultural capital be considered part of their value?
- Debate the role of sharing teachers 'own writing in workshops. When might this empower students? When might it intimidate?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Create a low-stakes "Risky Writing" activity: students write freely on a controversial or personally meaningful subject with no obligation to share. Reflect on how this changes the classroom dynamic.
- Choose a moment in your scheme of work where you currently provide a "writing formula." Experiment with removing the formula and replacing it with a provocation or sensory invitation.
- Design a lesson where students build their own reflective criteria for success, inspired by Cropley's idea of self-evaluation.
- Try beginning your next class by asking: "What's a story you haven't yet been allowed to tell?"—and see what emerges.

A MINDFUL PROMPT

Before your next session, pause for one minute. Breathe. Ask yourself: Who am I as a writer today? Who am I as a teacher? What might my students teach me about writing—if I let them?

CHAPTER 32: WRITING WHERE WE LIVE

LITERACY, PURPOSE, AND THE CREATIVE CLASSROOM

POEM: BEYOND THE MARGINS

They told me "Literacy means print"—
Black lines marching left to right.
But I knew better. I had danced
With stories whispered late at night.

My grandma wrote in Sunday stew,
My cousin rhymed while fixing bikes.
Mum spelled her fears through lipstick shades,
My brother mapped his world on Nikes.

Yet school meant silence, SATs, and rules,
A single font, a single goal.
Till one day, someone asked us all:
"Where else does writing shape your soul?"

TAKING LITERACY ECOLOGIES SERIOUSLY

David Barton's *Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language* (2007) proposes a powerful and humbling shift: literacy is not a ladder to climb, but a landscape we inhabit. School-based literacy is just one dialect in a world of textual practices—each tied to place, power, community, and need.

A *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* sees this ecology and teaches within it. They recognise that students already come to the classroom with literacy lives: texting, gaming, praying, rapping, cooking, captioning. Their job is not to replace these literacies, but to welcome and work with them.

By contrast, the *Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher* sees literacy—and creativity—as something schools must *impose*. They treat writing as a solitary academic exercise rather than a social, lived act. They favour print over performance, structure over exploration, correctness over purpose.

Let's consider these approaches through two case studies.

CASE STUDY 1: THE UNMINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – MR. KERR

Mr. K, runs a lunchtime "gifted writers" club at a secondary school in the suburbs. Participation is by teacher nomination only. Pupils write in silence for 30 minutes using prompts from past GCSE papers. Sharing is optional, but Mr. K. strongly favours literary prose. One student, Zara, brings in a rap poem inspired by a local drill artist. "This is fun," he says, "but try writing something more serious next time."

He praises one pupil's pastiche of Virginia Woolf but gives no feedback to the comic-strip memoir a quieter student has left on his desk. When asked about spoken word, he frowns. "We don't have the equipment for that." His pedagogy reflects a narrow band of school literacy—what Barton (2007) describes as reading and writing "for their own sakes," disconnected from real-world context or personal voice.

In Mr. K.'s club, creative writing is a gate-kept skill. Certain styles and voices flourish, others disappear.

CASE STUDY 2: THE MINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – MS. DUBE

Ms. D. teaches at a primary school in Birmingham and runs an intergenerational poetry project in the local library. She begins each term by asking students to bring in a "piece of writing that matters to your family." They share birthday cards, song lyrics, WhatsApp voice notes, recipes, football chants. "All writing," she tells them, "is creative if it connects."

She brings in Kadish Morris's article on the importance of poetry (2020) and asks, "Who gets to be a poet?" One student responds, "My uncle. He writes on toilet walls." Another: "My mum. She always makes rhymes when she's upset."

They write collaboratively and alone. They record their poems on phones and chalk them on pavements. Ms. Dube invites parents and neighbours to a "Poetry Roundhouse" where students read alongside local artists. Her students document where writing happens in their lives—becoming, as Barton suggests, "ethnographers of literacy."

In Ms. Dube's classroom, writing is community work. Creativity is not extracted—it's already there, waiting to be named and nurtured.

TEACHING BEYOND THE PAGE

Barton's insights align closely with *The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher*'s vision. Print literacy should not monopolise learning. Children learn informally and relationally. Literacy is lived, not merely taught.

Kadish Morris argues that poetry should be central to schooling because it allows children to connect language with emotion, identity, and justice. Poetry, she suggests, is the most inclusive and radical form of literacy—and yet often the first to be excluded from timetables and budgets.

The *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* takes these insights seriously. They build bridges between in-school and out-of-school literacies. They teach writing with a purpose, for audiences that matter. They listen for the literacies already alive in their students and use those to spark new growth.

Creative writing cannot thrive when confined to one narrow notion of literacy. It must breathe in the languages of home, street, screen, faith, and feeling. To teach mindfully is to step beyond the margins and make the classroom part of the real world—not a retreat from it.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM: THE CLASSROOM IS A STREET

The classroom is a street today—
The chatter spills, the music plays.
No need for pens, we write with shoes,
Our pages: windows, walls, tattoos.

We map our days in text and talk,
We spell in chalk along the walk.
And when the school bell calls us in,
We bring that noise beneath our skin.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- In your own teaching, how do you currently define and value "literacy"?
- What kinds of out-of-school literacies do your students bring into the classroom? Are these acknowledged or overlooked?
- Consider Barton's point that literacy is often learned "simultaneously and haphazardly." How might that insight reshape your lesson planning or assessment strategies?
- How do you respond to work that falls outside conventional literary forms—such as lyrics, spoken word, or graphic narrative? What does your response say about your teaching values?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Make a list of all the places, people, and objects that taught you to write *before* you learned it in school. Choose one item from the list and write a poem or scene that honours it.
- Write a classroom vignette—fictional or real—where a student challenges what counts as "writing." How does the teacher respond? Rewrite the scene twice: first with a mindful response, then with an unmindful one.
- Write a lesson starter or creative writing warm-up that draws explicitly on an everyday, non-school literacy (e.g., writing graffiti, texting, baking, storytelling at the dinner table).
- Begin with: *In this classroom, writing lives in...* and explore all the hidden forms of literacy you've witnessed.

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- What are the risks and rewards of opening the classroom to out-of-school literacies?
- Barton argues that people read and write for real purposes in everyday life. What implications does this have for how we set creative writing tasks in schools?
- How might a *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* build bridges between formal and informal writing practices? Share examples you've seen or experienced.

- Morris suggests poetry is an accessible, radical form of literacy. Do you agree? Why might it be undervalued in educational contexts?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Invite students to become "literacy ethnographers." Ask them to document where, when, and how people in their lives read and write. Use this research to inspire creative pieces.
- Design a mini-unit on *Everyday Poetry*, where students write poems inspired by overheard conversations, text messages, signs, or family traditions.
- Host a writing exchange where students bring in writing from outside school that matters to them and use it as a springboard for personal narrative or poetic transformation.
- Try replacing a traditional assignment with a multimodal creative project (e.g., a poem scored with music, a family recipe turned into a comic). Reflect on how this shifts student engagement.

A MINDFUL PROMPT

Before your next class, take one quiet moment to ask: What literacies are already alive in this room, even before I speak? How might I honour them today?

CHAPTER 33: WRITING TO BECOME

QUEER PRAXIS, SPOKEN WORD, AND CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE IN THE CREATIVE WRITING CLASSROOM

POEM: BECOMING

They told me "Write what you know,"
But I was still becoming.
My voice was tangled in the hedge
Of not-yet, never, humming.

So I wrote in lipstick, denim, sweat—
In shadows and in glare.
I stitched my poems into shirts
And shouted them in air.

And someone said, "I see you there,"
And someone said, "Me too."
We wrote ourselves a future
That the curriculum never knew.

CREATIVE WRITING AS BECOMING

Dallas John Baker (2013) introduces the concept of *Queer Writing* as a dynamic, multi-modal practice: a mixture of research, creative expression, critical theory, and lived experience that leads to new subjectivities. Writing becomes more than self-expression—it becomes *becoming*. This is especially important in relation to queer and marginalised identities, where writing is not just personal but political.

For the *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher*, Baker's idea of "creative writing praxis as queer becoming" is a call to broaden what counts as writing: to embrace the personal, the embodied, the theoretical, the playful, the political. Objects, images, sound, movement, and memory might all serve as compositional tools. Writing, in this frame, is not a product but a process of transformation—of the self, the classroom, and the world.

This pedagogy aligns with the activist tradition of Paulo Freire and its revival in contemporary spoken word education, as described by Fiore (2015). Spoken word is not just about poetry; it is about

naming oppression, reclaiming power, and creating a classroom in which students are recognised and heard.

CASE STUDY 1: THE UNMINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – B.T.

B.T. teaches in a mixed comprehensive school in a rural area. His creative writing lessons follow a set format: stimulus, structure, success criteria. The writing is fictional but safe—students are told to "avoid politics," "write something everyone can understand," and "stick to what you know."

When a student brings in a poetic monologue exploring gender dysphoria, B.T. says, "This is interesting, but we need to focus on pieces suitable for moderation." Another student writes a rap about police violence, and is told to "be careful with language." Feedback focuses on technical execution, not emotional or political meaning.

B.T. believes he's protecting his students—but he's also protecting the status quo. The writing is neat, apolitical, and disengaged from the students 'lived realities. There is no space for identity, struggle, or transformation. Writing is an exercise in compliance, not becoming.

CASE STUDY 2: THE MINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – H.L.

H.L. teaches in an economically deprived urban secondary school. Inspired by Baker (2013) and Freire (2014), she builds her creative writing curriculum around spoken word, critical autobiography, and multimodal storytelling. In the first session, students are invited to "write the part of yourself that school never sees."

They bring in photographs, trainers, family recipes, text messages, protest slogans. Writing takes place through zines, recordings, collages, and free verse. They read Kae Tempest, bell hooks, and Ocean Vuong. They co-construct a "writers 'manifesto" that includes: *We write to heal. We write to fight. We write to become who we are.*

H.L. uses a "funds of knowledge" approach (Gonzales & Moll, 2005), mapping what students know and care about in their

communities. One student writes a bilingual poem about her grandmother. Another creates a podcast about dance as resistance. Assessment includes process reflection, political context, and personal growth.

For H.L., creative writing is not about a neat ending—it's about becoming someone who can imagine a different beginning.

FROM FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE TO SPOKEN WORD LIBERATION

Fiore (2015) argues that spoken word pedagogy liberates students not only from silence, but from shame. It gives voice to the realities of race, class, gender, and place—realities often absent or distorted in traditional curricula. The *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* understands that in order to reach their students, they must engage with their culture and values—not superficially, but with deep curiosity and ethical care.

Hall and Thomson (2008) caution that even well-meaning arts projects can be undermined by school systems that prioritise performance over process, product over personhood. Their research shows that teachers need more than policy change—they need to unlearn habits of control, and re-learn how to honour the messy, complex, and radical stories young people bring with them.

This demands courage—and creativity. Teachers must learn to teach research as writing, to discuss ethics as craft, and to see activism as a legitimate goal of literary practice. As Baker (2013) insists, Queer Writing is always social practice—it doesn't end with the page.

To teach creative writing mindfully is to teach toward freedom. It is to ask: What can writing do in this world, and who gets to do it? The classroom becomes not a page, but a stage, a mirror, a map. And the writer? Someone who is always writing *into being*.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM: PRAXIS

Not just a page,
But a place.
Not just a phrase,
But a pulse.
Not just an end,
But a door.
Not just a voice—
But a voice becoming
More.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- How do your current teaching practices support or limit students 'exploration of identity through writing?
- Have you ever shied away from encouraging political or personal writing in your classroom? Why?
- What types of creative work or student experiences have been excluded—consciously or not—from your creative writing classroom?
- Do you currently treat writing as a product or as a process of becoming? What might shift if you centred identity development in your pedagogy?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Write a poem or short text beginning with: *They never knew this about me...* and let it lead you somewhere unexpected.
- Describe a moment in your life where writing changed your understanding of yourself. What did you become through that act?
- Choose a personal object (a shoe, a ticket stub, a scarf) and write its story as if it were a piece of your subjectivity.
- Imagine a future version of yourself who has written boldly and truthfully. Write a letter from them to your present self.

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- How do Baker's ideas about *Queer Writing* expand or challenge traditional ideas of creative writing pedagogy?
- In what ways does spoken word pedagogy (Fiore, 2015) resist the marginalisation of certain student voices?
- What do you understand by a "funds of knowledge" approach? How can it shape a writing curriculum that starts from students 'lived realities?
- Consider Hall and Thomson's critique of how the arts are positioned in schools. How might your practice push back against these limiting assumptions?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Co-create a classroom writing manifesto with your students. Include values like transformation, honesty, cultural relevance, and self-definition.
- Use spoken word poetry as a form of critical reflection. Ask students to respond to a social justice issue with a performed or recorded piece.
- Map your students 'funds of knowledge by inviting them to bring in objects, stories, or media that represent their learning beyond school. Use these as creative writing prompts.
- Teach research as part of creative practice: include interviews, oral histories, local archives, or community mapping in your writing schemes. Frame it as an act of care, not just information-gathering.

A MINDFUL PROMPT

Before your next class, ask: Am I making room for students to become who they are—not just write what fits? What forms of writing, speaking, and listening might I welcome today that weren't welcome yesterday?

CHAPTER 34: SHORT STORY DESIGN AS CREATIVE PROCESS

THE MINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER'S APPROACH

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher sees short story writing not merely as a task but as a journey through layered narrative terrain. Inspired by McDermott's analogy to video gaming (2015), the teacher designs a classroom experience in which students "level up" through stages of story development. The progression is not a linear march toward correctness, but a cycle of reflection, invention, and surprise.

This six-stage structure—Immediate Situation, Revelation, Conflict/Climax, Aftermath, Decisive Realisation, Conclusion—allows for pacing and scaffolded creativity. Students are gently nudged from one stage to the next, often without even knowing the full shape of the story ahead. The Mindful Teacher curates the writing environment: encouraging discussion, sharing of drafts, use of monologue, shifts in perspective, and creative risk-taking.

Importantly, assessment is embedded in the process. Success is not defined by a perfect product but by the development of voice, confidence, craft, and insight. The classroom becomes a space of narrative play, and progress is measured by student engagement, inventiveness, and the authenticity of their writing.

THE UNMINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER'S APPROACH

The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher might present the short story as a product to be churned out in a single go, often with a formulaic structure (beginning-middle-end) that leaves little room for nuance or exploration. If a structure is given, it may be rigidly imposed without attention to how students might emotionally or imaginatively engage with each stage.

In this context, assessment is summative and surface-level: does the story have a twist, is the grammar correct, does it conform to expectations? The richness of tone, voice, pacing, and rhythm—so central to McDermott's account of success—may go unnoticed.

Students are rushed, and the joy of crafting a story across multiple sessions is lost.

CASE STUDY: A SIX-LEVEL STORY JOURNEY

A Year 9 class begins with a writing prompt: *A figure is waiting at a crossroads in the rain*. The teacher does not immediately explain the full structure but introduces Stage One as "setting up a situation." Once students have created immersive openings, they are prompted to discover something new about their character or setting—Stage Two: Revelation.

One student, Amina, introduces an unexpected backstory through a phone call her character receives. As the story progresses into Conflict, then Aftermath, Amina realises her character's decisions have emotional consequences she hadn't anticipated. By the time she reaches the "Decisive Realisation," her writing deepens in tone and resonance. A final reading session confirms the emotional arc lands effectively with her peers.

The teacher makes informal assessments throughout: noting when students linger, struggle, or flourish. These become the basis for brief verbal check-ins, CRJ entries, and formative feedback.

KEY TEACHING STRATEGIES

- **Staged Narrative Structure**: Introduce a six-stage model inspired by McDermott and Sharples. Use gaming language if appropriate for your students—levels, achievements, progress indicators.
- **Discovery-Based Writing**: Reveal each stage gradually. Let students write into the unknown, discovering structure as they go.
- **Embedded Assessment**: Make space for discussion, performance, and self-reflection at the end of each stage. Use these as formative assessments.
- **Creative Variation**: Invite different kinds of writing at each stage—dialogue, monologue, interior thought, multiple perspectives.

- **Shared Criteria for Success**: Use McDermott's list of successful features—rhythm, word choice, perspective—to co-construct success criteria with your students.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM

Six Moves to Meaning
You started with rain on a windowpane,
a shadow crossing the street.
Then came the why, the crack in the name,
the moment they chose to retreat.
A pause, a pull, a turning around—
each stage a way to be found.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- How do the six stages of story development help you shape your ideas?
- Which stage is most challenging for you? Why?
- What does it mean to you to write with rhythm, voice, or confidence?
- How can progress be assessed without focusing only on the final draft?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Write Stage One: A character is stuck—physically or emotionally.
- Write Stage Two: A hidden detail is revealed. How does it change things?
- Write Stage Three: Something breaks. It doesn't have to be violent.
- Write Stage Four: Let confusion reign. What's the emotional fog?
- Write Stage Five: A new understanding emerges.
- Write Stage Six: End without answering everything.

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- Share how pacing your story in stages changed the way you write.
- How does reading your own work aloud affect your understanding of tone and rhythm?
- What different kinds of assessment (peer, self, teacher) helped you during the process?

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Design a short story project using the six-stage model. Over three weeks, build classroom time for each stage, including feedback sessions. Use learning journals (CRJs) for students to reflect after each stage. At the end, conduct a group "reading circle" to share highlights and discuss process learning.

MINDFUL PROMPT

As you write, pause between stages. Breathe. Ask yourself not "Is this good?" but "What's unfolding here?" Trust the slow reveal.

SECTION 6: CRAFT, COMMUNITY AND CARE

In this final section, we turn to the nuts and bolts of teaching writing—structure, rhythm, genre—but always through the lens of care. How do we build craft without losing connection? How do we nurture both individual voice and communal creativity? These chapters offer mindful, multimodal ways to teach writing as both an art and an ethic.

CHAPTER 35: HOLDING THE CIRCLE

RUNNING WRITING GROUPS WITH CARE AND COURAGE

POEM: THE TABLE

They came with pens and little hopes,
With questions stuffed inside their coats.
Some smiled, some stared down at the grain,
Some brought their grief, some brought their shame.

She lit a candle, passed around
A poem shaped like common ground.
Then silence fell, and breath returned.
The page was blank. But hearts had turned.

One wrote the truth in broken verse.
One wrote their name in their first curse.
One wrote a recipe for pain.
All wrote their way back home again.

The teacher gathered drafts, not marks—
And held the silence, light, and sparks.

THE WRITING GROUP AS JOURNEY

In Chapter 12 of *Write Yourself*, Gillie Bolton (2011) maps a vision of writing groups not as technical training grounds but as dynamic, relational journeys. People come to writing groups with many needs: to find permission, connection, craft, courage, camaraderie. Running such groups well requires more than a syllabus—it asks for stewardship of space, values, and shared purpose.

The *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* recognises that every writing group is a community-in-the-making. They create brave spaces grounded in **respect**, **trust**, and **responsibility**, the three guiding values Bolton identifies. They are attuned to the group's emotional rhythms and evolving needs. They know the journey will include stages—starting out, mutiny, resolution, mission, mourning—and they hold space for all of them.

By contrast, the *Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher* treats writing groups as little more than structured workshops. There may be feedback, but not fellowship; critique, but not care. The result is often surface-level engagement, exclusion of vulnerable voices, or even premature group breakdown.

Let's explore these contrasting approaches through two case studies.

CASE STUDY 1: THE UNMINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – DR. LEACH

Dr. Leach runs an eight-week adult creative writing course through a continuing education programme. From the first session, her approach is highly academic: she provides a syllabus, assigns formal exercises, and runs timed peer critiques based on "literary merit." She discourages personal writing as "too raw," and gives minimal response to emotional content unless it meets specific stylistic standards.

By week four, tension emerges. Two participants leave after feeling their trauma narratives were dismissed as "too sentimental."

Others stop sharing altogether. Dr. Leach blames the group's "lack of maturity" and pushes on with technical lectures. By the final session, attendance has dropped by half. There is no closure or celebration. The room empties quietly, without goodbye.

Here, the group never becomes a community. Trust and responsibility were neither modelled nor cultivated. Respect was selectively applied. The potential for a transformative journey was lost.

CASE STUDY 2: THE MINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – AYISHA

Ayisha teaches a community-based writing circle at a public library. The group includes single mothers, older adults, migrants, and two teenagers. In the first session, she places a candle at the centre and invites each person to bring something symbolic for the middle of the table. They begin with a shared reading—then freewrite, then share, only if they wish.

Ayisha acknowledges Bolton's stages openly: "Sometimes we will resist, fall out, or doubt ourselves. That's part of the process." In week three, a disagreement erupts when one participant critiques another's poem as "not real writing." Ayisha facilitates a dialogue—not to silence conflict, but to deepen understanding. By week six, the group has written collaboratively, laughed through blockages, and shared cake alongside villanelles.

In the final session, participants read their favourite piece aloud. One brings their child. Another brings a printed zine. Ayisha thanks each member personally and offers space to reflect on what they're taking away. The group hugs, promises to stay in touch, and plans a reunion.

Respect. Responsibility. Trust. These weren't rules—they were lived.

A WRITING GROUP IS A CIRCLE, NOT A LINE

Bolton's (2011) image of the writing group as a **journey** offers a vital metaphor. Unlike linear teaching methods, writing groups ebb and flow. They require emotional labour as much as intellectual

rigour. They are shaped not just by what is said, but by how it is held.

Course length, environment, tutor positioning—all matter. The *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* attends to these. They balance structure and spontaneity. They offer feedback that nurtures rather than judges. They model vulnerability and self-reflection.

Bolton's suggested introductory lesson plan—grounded in freewriting, discussion of writing purpose, and invitation to personal story—can be adapted to many settings, from prisons to primary schools, sixth forms to supper clubs. What matters most is not the setting, but the values carried into it.

To run a writing group mindfully is to host a home for words and their makers. It is to acknowledge the emotional risks of creativity, and to meet them with hospitality, not hierarchy. It is to guide a group not just to write—but to return changed.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM: THE GROUP THAT STAYED

They came for words, and stayed for voice,
For stitched-together, half-baked choice.
They read each other into light,
They wrote in grief, in rage, in flight.

The kettle boiled. The rain fell on.
They drafted truths the world had shunned.
When one fell silent, others heard.
And silence, too, became a word.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- Which of Bolton's group stages have you personally experienced—as a teacher, a student, or both? What did "mutiny" look like, and how (or whether) was it resolved?
- What kind of energy do you bring to a writing group? Are you the firestarter, the peacemaker, the quiet steady one, the guide? How might that shape your facilitation?

- Which of the core principles—**trust**, **respect**, **responsibility**—comes most naturally to you? Which do you need to consciously cultivate when teaching?
- What are the unspoken rules in your current writing groups or classrooms? Whose voices are invited, and whose are unintentionally sidelined?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Write a letter to a writing group you were once part of (real or imagined). What would you thank them for? What did you leave unsaid?
- Imagine a group that dissolves halfway through a course. Write the scene where a student walks out—and what happens after.
- Describe a room in which you'd want to host your ideal writing group. What's on the walls? What sounds are in the air? What's missing?
- Write from the perspective of a person who speaks for the first time in a group, after many weeks of silence. What changes?

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- Discuss whether feedback should always be "constructive" or whether it can also be poetic, emotional, open-ended. How do we define "constructive" when dealing with deeply personal writing?
- Bolton values "a bit of fun" alongside depth. How can playfulness support—not detract from—serious engagement in writing groups?
- What can a writing group learn from group therapy models, or improvisation ensembles, or even dance troupes? Where do other disciplines intersect with group writing pedagogy?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Create a writing group "charter" collaboratively with your students. Ask them to define what respect, trust, and responsibility look like in their own terms.

- Use Bolton's "mutiny" stage as a creative metaphor. Invite your group to freewrite from the perspective of a pirate crew or a rebel poet's circle, exploring dynamics of challenge and resolution.
- Build in a "ritual of return" for your group's final session—whether through readings, writing letters to the group, or collaboratively creating a group poem or zine.
- Try beginning one session with no fixed task—only the question: *What do we need from writing today?* Observe what arises.

A MINDFUL PROMPT

Sit for one minute before your next group. Breathe slowly. Imagine each person as a book not yet opened. What titles might they carry today? Are you prepared to read without skipping chapters?

CHAPTER 36: LISTENING TO THE WRITERS

IDEOLOGY, IMAGINATION AND THE DISCOURSES OF WRITING

POEM: WHO OWNS THE PEN?

They gave me a scaffold and sentence stems,
A checklist like a map.
But nowhere marked my mum's front room,
Or how my brother raps.

They praised my adverbs, circled flaws,
Said, "Write like this, not that."
But I had stories in my bones—
Not in their format.

Then one day, someone asked me:
"What does writing mean to you?"
I answered with my body,
And the stories I once drew.

We talked. We danced. We played a part.
The lines bent into me.
And for the first time, I believed
That writing could be free.

DISCOURSES OF WRITING: A SHARED LANDSCAPE

What do we mean when we talk about "writing"? According to Ivanic (2004), our beliefs about writing form part of broader *discourses*—sets of values and assumptions that influence how we teach, talk about, assess, and understand it. These include:

- **Skills** (accuracy, spelling, grammar)
- **Creativity** (expression, imagination)
- **Process** (planning, drafting, revising)
- **Genre** (structure, audience expectations)
- **Social practice** (real-life purposes and contexts)
- **Social political** (writing as an agent of change)

Lambirth (2016) applies this framework in his study of children's perceptions of writing in English classrooms. He finds that many

teachers, while privately embracing a broader vision, feel forced into narrow, formulaic approaches designed to "succeed" in formal assessments. This tension creates a sense of alienation. But when teachers listen to students *'ideological perceptions* of writing—how they see it, feel it, value it—new pedagogical possibilities emerge.

Let's see how this plays out in practice.

CASE STUDY 1: THE UNMINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – J.K.

J.K. teaches Key Stage 2 in a suburban school. She is experienced and well-regarded by leadership for her results in writing assessments. Her classroom displays neatly laminated genre guides and exemplar texts annotated with success criteria.

J.K. structures her creative writing lessons tightly. Each week centres on a genre—diary, newspaper, narrative—and each genre has a toolkit: fronted adverbials, rhetorical questions, complex sentences. She instructs students to "make it exciting" but expects adherence to fixed formats.

When one child writes a story based on a video game with non-linear scenes, J.K. tells him to "try something more sensible for SATs." Another, who submits a comic book strip, is told it "isn't real writing."

J.K. privately misses the days when writing was looser, freer. But she fears that "if I don't teach the formula, they'll fail."

Here, the Skills and Genre discourses dominate. Creativity is tolerated only within formal boundaries. Social practices, drama, and oral storytelling are absent.

CASE STUDY 2: THE MINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – D.L.

D.L. works in a rural primary school where many children arrive with rich oral storytelling traditions but don't do very well in exams with their writing. D.L. uses Ivanic's discourses to audit her practice and opens a dialogue with her students: "When do you *want* to write? When do you *hate* it?"

Children talk about storytelling in the playground, rapping in cousins 'bedrooms, voice notes sent to absent parents. Inspired by

this, D.L. experiments. One day, she brings in a storytelling stick. They pass it round and improvise tales aloud. Another day, they dramatise scenes before writing. Some sessions begin with physical movement or sound-making to unlock narrative rhythms.

She introduces multiple entry points into writing—audio recording, visual planning, comics, scripts. She invites choice of form and audience. A pupil chooses to write a letter to a councillor about a lack of green space. Another creates a recipe for how to survive a hard day.

Formal elements—spelling, punctuation, cohesion—are still taught. But they arise through purpose, not prescription. Her students are not "fitting the mould"—they're shaping their own.

TEACHING AS LISTENING: WHAT WE LEARN FROM LAMBIRTH

Lambirth's study shows that many teachers, like J.K., feel conflicted. They believe in writing as a process of discovery and personal expression, but feel beholden to narrow definitions of success. This can erode their sense of agency and lead to a loss of joy in teaching.

But when teachers, like D.L., actively listen to students 'lived experiences and beliefs about writing, pedagogy can shift. This doesn't mean abandoning structure—but enriching it with choice, purpose, collaboration, and embodied experience. Oral storytelling, drama, peer discussion, and flexible formats become not add-ons, but core tools.

The *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* constantly asks: *Which discourses are shaping my teaching right now? Are they serving or stifling my students?* They aim to create a balance—not just between genres or skills, but between what students need to pass and what they need to grow.

To teach writing mindfully is to teach it plurally—to honour its many meanings and uses, and to resist reducing it to a set of features or functions. It is to see writing not as a formula to follow, but a world to enter—on foot, in song, through play, and in the company of others.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM: SIX VOICES

One says: *Check your spelling.*
One says: *Show, don't tell.*
One says: *Draft it like a journey.*
One says: *Stories cast a spell.*
One says: *Write what really matters—*
What your life won't let you say.
One whispers: *Use this pen for justice.*
Push the boundaries. Find a way.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- Which of Ivanic's six discourses—Skills, Creativity, Process, Genre, Social Practice, Social Political—most shape your teaching at present? Which are least visible? Why might that be?
- How do the dominant discourses in your setting reflect larger institutional or political pressures? How do they affect your students 'freedom to write as they wish?
- Reflect on a time you felt alienated from your own writing (as a student or teacher). Which discourse dominated that moment? What might have helped?
- How often do you ask your students what writing means *to them*? What might you learn from listening?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Choose one of Ivanic's discourses and write a short fictional scene in which a teacher embodies that approach—intentionally or not. Then rewrite the scene through the lens of a different discourse.
- Freewrite on the prompt: *The writing lesson that changed me.* Then analyse which discourse(s) were present and why they made a difference.
- Write a dialogue between two characters—one who sees writing as rule-following, one who sees it as rebellion. Let them argue, persuade, or compromise.

- Draft a manifesto beginning with: *In my writing classroom, we believe...*

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- What happens when we reduce writing to a skillset or a checklist? Who benefits, and who is left out?
- In your own school or institution, which discourses are most rewarded? Which are discouraged or marginalised?
- How can we create classroom cultures that encourage students to bring in their out-of-school literacies and ideological perceptions of writing?
- What role might oral storytelling and drama play in disrupting dominant writing discourses in your setting? Could they become core strategies rather than occasional extras?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Carry out a discourse audit. Choose a week's worth of your lesson plans or resources and annotate which discourses they draw upon. Reflect on the balance—and any absences.
- Run a class inquiry into "What is writing?" Ask students to create posters or zines that express their beliefs about writing. Use these to open up discussions about discourse.
- Plan a writing activity rooted in *social practice*: for example, a real-world letter, a protest chant, a local history comic. Discuss its relevance and purpose.
- Use drama or oral storytelling as pre-writing. Invite students to role-play characters or improvise scenes before putting pen to paper. Reflect afterwards on how this shaped their written work.

A MINDFUL PROMPT

Before your next lesson, ask yourself: What beliefs about writing am I carrying into this room? Are they opening the space—or narrowing it? Can I teach from a place of curiosity, not certainty?

CHAPTER 37: RETHINKING NORMS:

NEURODIVERGENCE IN THE CREATIVE WRITING CLASSROOM

OPENING NARRATIVE: THE SENTENCE THAT WOULDN'T SIT STILL

It started when Cassie flipped her chair backwards and knelt on it like a horse, scribbling something into the air with her finger before she reached for her notebook. She muttered to herself in fragments—half a sentence here, a sound there, a metaphor about seaweed. The rest of the class was silent, heads down. The teacher cleared her throat.

"Cassie, could you sit properly?"

Cassie stared at the page. "I nearly had it," she whispered. "It was right there."

She wrote best like this: upright but upside down, pacing to think, speaking her sentences aloud before they landed. If she sat still for too long, the words stopped moving.

Last week, she'd written a story in flashes: drawings, dialogue, maps. Her teacher returned it with a line in red ink: "Needs a clear structure." Cassie didn't understand. The story had structure—it just wasn't straight.

This week, she started again. She pulled the sleeves over her hands and wrote a line about a girl whose sentences refused to stay on the page. She had no idea how it ended yet.

But she was still writing.

Creative writing thrives on difference. And yet, in many classrooms, there's an unspoken template for what a "good writer" looks like: organised, responsive to feedback, neat, expressive, linear. But what if a student writes best by pacing the room, recording voice notes, or scripting dialogue aloud before they can write anything down? What if structure is a cage, not scaffolding?

The *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* embraces neurodiversity—not as a challenge to be managed, but as a creative resource. They understand that students with ADHD, autism, dyslexia, or anxiety may approach writing in ways that differ

dramatically from neurotypical norms—but that these approaches can produce some of the most original, surprising, and emotionally resonant work in the room.

Drawing on insights from educational psychology and emerging neurodivergent scholarship in writing pedagogy, this chapter invites us to design writing environments that honour sensory needs, flexible pacing, and alternative forms of expression—not to "accommodate," but to **activate** the power of different minds.

CASE STUDY 1: THE UNMINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – M.S.

M.S. teaches a creative writing elective in a large sixth form college. Her lessons are tightly structured around timed writing exercises, discussion-based feedback, and formal assessment. She prides herself on "high expectations" and equal treatment for all.

When one student, D., who has an autism diagnosis, asks to use noise-cancelling headphones during freewriting, M.S. says, "But how will you hear the atmosphere of the room?" Another student, A., who has ADHD, submits a poetic collage made from images, phrases, and voice notes. M.S. returns it with the comment: "This doesn't follow the brief."

Despite the presence of neurodivergent students, M.S. insists on a single mode of production: written, typed, linear. There's no sensory flexibility, no alternatives for planning or presenting, no space to challenge the conventions of the form. Students who think differently must first write like everyone else.

CASE STUDY 2: THE MINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – R.J.

R.J. teaches creative writing to Year 9 students in a mainstream secondary school. Her approach is multisensory, flexible, and open-ended. She begins the term by asking, "How do you like to think? What helps you write?" Students co-create a "writing menu" of options: pacing, doodling, dictating, talking to a partner, using colour, choosing silence.

One student, J., who is dyspraxic, uses speech-to-text software to write a monologue. Another, B., who struggles with executive

function, creates a storyboard of images and emojis to plan a narrative. A third, L., writes best while walking—so R.J. gives them a "walking notebook" for use during breaks.

Assessment includes process journals and self-evaluation. R.J. asks questions like: *What helped you? What got in the way? What surprised you about your thinking?* Feedback focuses on clarity and originality, not just structure or neatness.

For R.J., creative writing is not about fitting in—it's about finding form. And for many students, that means forms that move, stretch, and sing.

DESIGNING NEURO-INCLUSIVE WRITING PEDAGOGY

Neurodivergent learners may process language differently, imagine in unexpected ways, or engage with metaphor and structure in non-linear, deeply intuitive forms. This isn't a deficit—it's creative diversity.

The *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* might include:

- **Flexible writing spaces**: allowing students to write while standing, sitting, lying down, or walking.
- **Multimodal outputs**: accepting voice notes, comics, maps, collages, and performance scripts as valid writing artefacts.
- **Sensory-sensitive environments**: dimmed lights, noise-reducing options, calming routines.
- **Pacing choices**: options for extended drafting time or segmented tasks.
- **Planning diversity**: offering spider diagrams, mind maps, audio planning, and one-on-one chats.

This approach isn't about individual education plans (IEPs) or "support" in the bureaucratic sense. It's about reimagining what writing is and can be, and who gets to succeed at it.

To write differently is not to write wrongly. Neurodivergence is not something to work around—it's something to work *with*. And when we do, we find writing that breaks rules, bends language, and touches meaning in fresh, startling ways.

The *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* doesn't just make space for this. They make it possible.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

NARRATIVE PROMPT: FROM THE MARGINS INWARD

Cassie's story doesn't end. It begins again—every time she picks up the pen. Or the highlighter. Or the voice memo app.

What stories haven't yet begun in your classroom, because the right tools—or space—weren't there?

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- Do your current teaching practices assume a "standard" writing process? What kinds of learners might this unintentionally exclude?
- How do your expectations around planning, drafting, or presenting writing reflect neurotypical norms?
- What would it mean to treat a student's sensory or cognitive difference not as a barrier, but as a source of creative potential?
- Think of a time when a student wrote or thought differently. What happened? What might have happened if their way of working had been validated?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Write a piece where a character communicates non-verbally—through images, textures, sounds, or movement. Let the form reflect the mode.
- Create a fragmented narrative: tell a story through disjointed snapshots or impressions. Don't worry about linearity.
- Freewrite using a non-dominant sense (touch, smell, proprioception). What kind of writing emerges when you focus there?
- Choose an object with personal sensory significance (a hoodie, a scent, a piece of music). Write its story—and yours.

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- What assumptions do our institutions (and we as teachers) make about what "counts" as creative writing? Who gets included—and who doesn't?
- How might an open-ended, student-led approach to process and presentation shift classroom dynamics for neurodivergent learners?
- In what ways does feedback in your classroom reward neatness, coherence, or clarity over originality, voice, or experimentation?
- What possibilities might open if we let form follow *feeling* rather than convention?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- **Create a 'Writing Options Menu'**: include writing while walking, using dictation tools, writing in chunks, visual planning, and co-writing. Let students choose.
- **Use sensory scaffolds**: offer texture boxes, music, colour-coded planning sheets, or soundscapes to trigger writing.
- **Introduce multimodal storytelling**: accept comics, podcasts, video-poems, photo essays, or hybrid forms as creative submissions.
- **Design a 'Process Journal'** where students reflect not just on what they wrote, but *how* they wrote it—what helped, what hindered, and what surprised them.
- **Adapt feedback practices**: try oral feedback, video responses, or visual annotations. Let students reflect and respond.

A MINDFUL PROMPT

Before your next session, ask yourself: Am I designing for sameness, or for difference? Can I create a space where a student like Cassie wouldn't just cope—but thrive?

CHAPTER 38: MINDFULLY TEACHING POETRY

BREATH, FORM, AND FREEDOM

POEM: BAD POEM (A GIFT)

I am a toaster of metaphors.
My feelings smell like Monday.
I used to love a comma,
now I prefer full stops.
This poem is not clever.
It doesn't know what it's doing.
But it showed up.
And so did I.

Sometimes the most liberating thing a creative writing teacher can do is read out a **bad poem**—especially one of their own.

A piece that stumbles, breaks the rules, wears its awkwardness like a badge. Not as a joke, but as a gesture: *You don t have to get it right. You just have to begin.*

The **Mindful Creative Writing Teacher** knows that poetry classrooms are often laced with anxiety—fear of exposure, fear of failure, fear of not being 'poetic'. They dismantle that fear not with lofty examples, but with **permission**. By making themselves vulnerable first, they give others the space to take creative risks.

The **Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher**, by contrast, leads with formalism. Their poetry sessions begin with the sonnet, the haiku, the ode—as fixed forms to be mastered. Their feedback is tidy, often technical. The implicit message: poetry is about getting it right.

But poetry, as the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher knows, begins in **presence**, not precision. In rhythm, not in rules. In breath, not in structure.

There are few moments more fragile in a creative writing classroom than when someone reads a poem aloud.

It might be three lines. It might be a rambling stream of memory, or a protest shaped into metaphor. It might rhyme. It might not. The moment hangs in the air—unfixed, ungraded, unguarded.

Poetry is often where writers feel most exposed, and where they are most frequently mis-taught. The **Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher** treats poetry as a product: something neat, controlled, and assessable. They teach 'poetic devices 'as if poetry were a puzzle to be solved or a list to be spotted. Rhyme, alliteration, enjambment, simile—tick, tick, tick. The result is often lifeless work, bent into forms it doesn't need.

The **Mindful Creative Writing Teacher**, by contrast, treats poetry as a practice. A way of noticing. A way of being. They recognise that poetry does not begin with line breaks—it begins with attention. They create space for poets to breathe. They know that a poem might be shaped on the page, but it is born in the body.

CASE STUDY 1: A YEAR 9 CLASS AND THE POEM THAT WASN'T

In a Year 9 classroom in London, a student named Zahra has written something personal. It begins, "Sometimes I walk like silence is following me." She hasn't called it a poem. She isn't sure what it is. The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher asks, "Where's your metaphor? Can you add some rhyme?" The moment collapses.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher pauses. They ask, "Would you like to read it aloud?" Zahra nods. The class listens. Afterwards, they are invited to respond: not with corrections, but with associations. "It reminded me of a tunnel," one student says. "It felt like it was happening in fog," says another. Then they write their own pieces, inspired by hers. Zahra doesn't just learn about poetry—she experiences herself as a poet.

BREATH, FORM, AND SLOWNESS

Teaching poetry mindfully begins with **slowing down**. With inviting learners to notice what they already carry: rhythms of speech, phrases overheard, a certain way of walking. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher might begin with a short guided writing meditation—"Close your eyes. What colour is today? What's the

texture of this morning's silence?" From this place, poems emerge. They do not start with form. They start with **presence**.

Form is not abandoned—but it is introduced gently. "What happens if we break the line here?" "What does the space say?" The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher invites exploration. The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher might begin with the sonnet and ask learners to imitate it before they have anything to say. This is not poetic form—it is a form of constraint.

CASE STUDY 2: ADULTS IN A COMMUNITY SETTING

In a community workshop for adults returning to education, a man called Paul writes a poem about fishing with his grandfather. It's conversational, unpunctuated, without stanzas. The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher comments, "It needs more structure." Paul shrinks.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher says, "This reads like breath. Would you be open to shaping the pauses with line breaks?" Together, they look at where the energy of the poem wants to go. Paul doesn't just learn about poetry—he learns that *his voice is enough*.

TEACHING TECHNIQUES THAT HONOUR THE POET

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher may use a range of approaches:

- **Poem as object**: Bring in a physical item (a feather, a key, a stone). Ask: "What does it want to say?"
- **Blackout poems**: Use newspaper articles and score out words to reveal a hidden message.
- **Echo writing**: Read a poem aloud. Invite learners to write a response using its rhythm or structure.
- **Haiku walks**: Take students outside. Ask them to write what they see in seventeen syllables or less.
- **Collective poems**: Begin with a single line, pass the page around the group, each writer adding a new one.

In all of these, what matters is not technical correctness, but **permission**—to play, to shape, to express.

POETIC RISK AND THE LEARNING PIT

Poetry can feel risky. It asks for emotional openness. It invites failure. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher acknowledges this. They frame the poem not as evidence of ability, but as a gesture. A reaching. A way of asking: "Can you hear me?" They respond with care.

The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher may mark poems like essays, looking for features. This teaches students not how to write, but how to hide.

To teach poetry well is not to teach "about poetry"—it is to teach **from** poetry. From the body. From listening. From the breath.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM: THIS IS NOT A POEM

It doesn't rhyme.
There are no metaphors,
except the ones I didn't know I was using.
But you listened—
and so I called it a poem.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- What's your earliest memory of writing or reading a poem? Was it liberating, confusing, limiting?
- How do you feel when someone asks you to write a poem on demand?
- In your teaching, do you ever equate poetic success with technical mastery? What other values could you highlight?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Write a "poem" that doesn't look like a poem. Let the rhythm of your thoughts guide the shape.
- Take a piece of prose you've written. Break it into lines. What changes?

- Find a photograph or object. Write five lines that say what it remembers.

TEACHING ACTIVITIES

- Invite students to write poems that begin with "Sometimes…" and let them choose the form.
- Pair learners to create echo poems—one writes a line, the other responds.
- Use a group soundscape (e.g., rustling paper, whispered words, snapped fingers) as a prompt for sensory poetry.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Before beginning a poetry session, breathe and ask: **What if today's poem already lives in the room—waiting to be heard?**
Then teach as if you are listening for it.

CHAPTER 39: MINDFULLY TEACHING SHORT FICTION

SMALL STORIES, BIG WORLDS

OPENING VIGNETTE: THE FLASH OF IT

It is 9.27 a.m. A student, arriving late, hands in a crumpled A5 scrap.

The teacher reads:

He always knocked twice, even though I was already at the door. I never asked why. I just opened it, every time, knowing this might be the time he left.

Twelve lines. No title. The class falls silent.

"Is this a story?" someone asks.
The teacher smiles. "It might be all the story we need."

Short fiction is often where students begin—whether as flash, micro, vignette, or scene. But it is also frequently misunderstood. The **Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher** sees short stories as reduced novels. They teach plot structure with a stopwatch. "Beginning, middle, end," they say, ticking off a checklist. The story becomes mechanical, shaped to formula, rather than feeling.

The **Mindful Creative Writing Teacher** knows that short fiction is not small fiction. It is fiction that breathes within limits. It thrives on implication, ambiguity, compression, and *cutting away*. They teach not how to bulk up stories, but how to find what's essential.

Short fiction invites us to ask: *How much can we leave out? What haunts the white space?*

CASE STUDY 1: THE VANISHING BOY

In a Key Stage 4 classroom, a student named Amir writes a one-paragraph story in response to a visual prompt of a bus stop at dusk. It begins with a boy waiting for someone and ends with the line: "Only his coat remained." No explanation. No backstory. Just loss.

The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher circles the paragraph with red ink. "Needs more detail. Who was the boy? Why did he vanish?" The story is returned to Amir with a request to expand.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher reads it aloud to the class and asks: "What do we know? What don't we know? What makes this moment land?" A discussion follows about absence, mystery, and restraint. Amir's story stays short—but grows in meaning.

TEACHING SHORT FICTION MINDFULLY

1. Begin with images, not instructions: A compelling photograph, a found object, or a one-line overheard phrase can be more generative than a worksheet. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher might say: "What happens just after this picture ends?" or "Write the second sentence of a story—but not the first."

2. Teach compression as power: Students often think they need to say *everything*. But short fiction asks them to trust the reader. "What if you removed this paragraph?" the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher might ask. "Does it get stronger?" They model radical editing as a creative act, not a punishment.

3. Prioritise voice and image: Short fiction often works because of tone, mood, or a single image. A character standing in a petrol station at midnight. A phone ringing in a silent house. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher asks: "What does the image suggest? What does it refuse to say?"

4. Invite form to follow feeling: The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher teaches beginning-middle-end structure as gospel. But the Mindful Teacher is open to fragmentation, circular narratives, scene-only stories, and pieces that end on a breath rather than a bang. They reference Lydia Davis, Raymond Carver, Sandra Cisneros, Kit de Waal—writers who understand that a story doesn't have to be long to be complete.

CASE STUDY 2: SIX WORDS

In a writing group for care leavers, the teacher opens with Hemingway's infamous six-word story: *For sale: baby shoes, never worn."*

One student, Aysha, writes:

They came, they fought, I stayed.

Then another:

Still here. Still hungry. Still writing.

No one asks for more. No one needs to.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher treats these as full pieces. Not exercises, but *stories*. In doing so, they affirm the authority of lived experience, and the dignity of brevity.

ETHICS AND THE SHORT FORM

When stories are brief, every choice matters. What do we show? Who gets to speak? The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher facilitates conversations about perspective, omission, implication. They ask: *What s not being said? Who s in the margins? What does the silence suggest?*

Short fiction isn't just a form—it's a way of thinking about voice, truth, and power. Teaching it mindfully means teaching with attention to what's present, and to what's left unsaid.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM: MICRO

They said it wasn't enough.
Too short. Too slight.
Just a whisper.
But it changed me.
So I kept it.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- How have you been taught to define a 'successful 'short story? How might that definition be challenged?
- What stories do you write when you have only 100 words? What emerges when you have no space to hide?
- How do you respond when students bring you fragments, not finished work?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Write a story in six words. Then twelve. Then twenty-four. Notice what changes—and what stays true.
- Begin a story with the second sentence. Let the first sentence remain missing.

- Choose an everyday object (a key, a receipt, a sock). Write the story it's hiding.

TEACHING ACTIVITIES

- Use photo prompts and ask students to write a scene just before or just after the image.
- Create a class anthology of "one-paragraph stories" and print them on postcards.
- Invite students to cut a 300-word story down to 150, then 75. Reflect on what gets sharper—and what's lost.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Before teaching a short story session, pause and ask: **What is the minimum I need to say, to make something meaningful happen?**
Then begin—briefly, but with care.

CHAPTER 40: MINDFULLY TEACHING THE NOVEL

CASE STUDY 1: THE OVERWHELM

Amelia is fifteen. She's written three beginnings to three different novels. One is about a haunted asylum. One follows two sisters during a civil war. The third is dystopian, but she's not sure what's gone wrong with the world yet. She's stalled on all of them.

Her teacher reads each one and says kindly, "Try to finish one." Amelia nods, ashamed. She stops writing.

CASE STUDY 2: THE THREAD

Nico, in his sixties, is writing his first novel. A family saga set across two continents and three decades. He brings in one chapter a week to a local adult writing group. It's messy—scene fragments, abrupt time shifts, unfinished dialogue. But each week, his tutor listens for something shimmering.

One day she says, "That sentence—you said her voice was like water running over bones. That's your novel. That's your thread."

Nico weeps. He's found it. He keeps going.

TEACHING THE LONG FORM MINDFULLY

Teaching longer fiction—novels, novellas, extended narratives—is an exercise in **holding space**. Not just for plot and character, but for the writer's stamina, self-belief, and uncertainty. The **Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher** focuses on structure first: outlines, beats, arcs, acts. They ask for plans before pages. The writing becomes a task to be managed rather than a world to be inhabited.

The **Mindful Creative Writing Teacher**, by contrast, treats the long form as an unfolding relationship. They don't ask, "What's your plot?" They ask, "What's your question?" They help the writer find the emotional or thematic current that will pull them through.

They know that a novel isn't written in one go—it's discovered in loops, through detours and doubt.

HOLDING UNCERTAINTY: A LONG GAME

Longer fiction demands that writers sit with **not knowing**. They may not understand their characters yet. Their setting may be foggy. They may get bored with their own work.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher normalises this. They offer tools for **creative endurance**: journalling, mind-mapping, reflective letters to one's future reader. They encourage partial drafts, speculative outlines, even 'wrong turns'. They ask students not to finish a novel—but to stay in relationship with it.

The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher often demands coherence too early. They may say, "This doesn't make sense," when what the work needs is time to meander and return. They may teach structure as prescription, rather than discovery.

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING LONGER FICTION

1. Scaffold a Practice, Not a Product: The Mindful Teacher supports writers to create *rituals*—regular time to write, reflect, and rest. They build a culture of patient progress. A 500-word scene matters. So does a deleted chapter. All of it is part of the work.

2. Encourage Narrative Journalling: Writers keep a novel notebook where they reflect on their characters 'voices, argue with their plots, or chart their emotional journey alongside the text. This fosters metacognition and resilience.

3. Teach Structure as Inhabited, Not Imposed: The Unmindful Teacher may deliver lessons on 'The Hero's Journey 'or the 'Three-Act Structure 'as fixed templates. The Mindful Teacher introduces these as *offers*, not rules. "Where is your turning point?" they might ask. "What's the emotional shape of this draft?"

4. Use Milestones, Not Deadlines: Instead of "Finish Chapter One by next week," the Mindful Teacher says, "Bring something your novel wants to say next." This keeps the writing alive and responsive.

CASE STUDY 3: THE MIDDLE DOLDRUMS

Jacob is stuck in the middle of his novel. The characters have stopped speaking. The plot has no momentum. In his one-to-one tutorial, the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher doesn't ask, "How can you get to the end?" Instead, they ask, "Where's the last place the writing felt alive?" Jacob flips back through his notes. A throwaway line about a train station scene sparks something. The novel begins to breathe again.

EMOTIONAL LITERACY AND THE LONG FORM

Writing a novel is not just an intellectual task—it's emotional labour. Doubt, boredom, imposter syndrome, grief, and longing are all part of the process. The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher makes room for this. They remind students that writing is both a craft and a kind of care.

They offer gentle reframing: *This isn t working* becomes *This isn t ready yet.* *I m failing* becomes *I m learning what this novel needs.*

The Unmindful Teacher often ignores emotion or pathologises it. "You're too close to it," they might say, or "Just push through." But mindful pedagogy understands that every novel requires moments of stillness and return.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM: THE LONG DREAM

It didn't come all at once.
It came in fragments—
a sound here,
a name there.

I wrote it into being.
And some days,
it wrote me.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- What is your relationship with long-form writing? Have you ever abandoned a longer project? What did you learn?
- Do you rush your students into structure before they're ready? What would it mean to slow the novel down?
- How do you help writers develop stamina—without resorting to pressure or guilt?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Write a letter from your main character to you, the author. What do they want to tell you?
- Find a scene you love in your novel draft. Rewrite it from another character's point of view.
- Draft a list titled "Things My Novel Knows (That I Don't Yet)."

TEACHING ACTIVITIES

- Create a "novel map" wall where students post the emotional beats of their drafts—joy, regret, turning points—rather than plot events.
- Invite students to write a "novel obituary": what might their novel become if they stopped now? What would be left behind? Then ask if they want to continue.
- Use timelines, playlists, or mood boards to help students reconnect with the world of their novel when stuck.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Before a novel-writing session, ask yourself: **What part of the novel is speaking most clearly today?** Let that part lead. The rest will come.

CHAPTER 41: MINDFULLY TEACHING NON-FICTION:

LIFE WRITING, TRUTH, AND TELLING IT SLANT

VIGNETTE: THE DETAIL THAT BROKE

In a workshop on writing memoir, the room is quiet. A student, Amara, reads aloud:

She always wore the same perfume—sharp, like oranges on fire. The last time I hugged her, it was fading.

No names. No long explanation. Just one image—and the atmosphere changes.

Someone exhales softly. Another closes her eyes. The teacher nods. "That detail," she says. "It carries the whole story."

Non-fiction—memoir, personal essay, biography, creative reportage—is often where writers come closest to the core of their experience. But it is also where they risk the most. The **Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher** treats life writing like confession: a pouring-out of content to be shaped, polished, or improved. They focus on clarity, facts, structure, voice. But they forget to ask: *What does it cost to tell the truth?*

The **Mindful Creative Writing Teacher**, by contrast, knows that truth is never neutral. They invite care. They remind students that life writing is a negotiation: between memory and imagination, between self and other, between story and silence.

They teach life writing not as exposure, but as transformation.

CASE STUDY 1: THE MISSING WORD

In a community course for older writers, a participant named David is working on a memoir about his childhood. He's written pages about his father's job, his old school, the street he grew up on. But one paragraph ends, "I never told anyone what happened in that cupboard."

The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher says, "Can you expand on that? Give us the detail." David doesn't return the following week.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher pauses. They say, "You've already said something very powerful. Do you want to stay with that moment, or move away from it?" David breathes. He stays.

Mindful pedagogy in life writing means asking *whether* to write, not just how.

TEACHING LIFE WRITING MINDFULLY

1. Start with the sensory, not the story: Many students approach memoir with huge chronological ambitions. "I'm writing about my whole childhood," they say. But the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher begins with a fragment: the smell of a flat, the sound of a name, the shape of a scar. Small details that open doors.

2. Allow the slant: Not all truth needs to be written directly. The Mindful Teacher draws on Emily Dickinson's advice: *Tell all the truth but tell it slant."* They use metaphor, allegory, third-person versions of self, even fiction-as-mask to help students find safe ways into difficult stories.

3. Acknowledge relational ethics: Life writing always involves others. The Unmindful Teacher may tell students, "Just change the names." The Mindful Teacher opens up ethical discussions: *Who are you writing about? What permissions matter here? What s at stake in this telling—for you, for them?*

4. Treat the page as a listening space: When students bring in painful or complicated work, the Mindful Teacher does not interrogate. They witness. "Do you want feedback, or just space to read?" they ask. This re-centres agency.

CASE STUDY 2: THE AUNT WHO WASN'T

In a secondary school class, a student writes a lyrical piece about their Auntie May. Midway through, it's revealed that May doesn't exist—she's a composite. A teacher says, "This isn't memoir. It's made up." The student goes silent.

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher later says, "It's still truth. Emotional truth. Poetic truth. You wrote May into being because something in you needed her." The piece becomes the start of an autofictional novella.

Mindful life writing is not about catching lies—it's about honouring the complexity of memory.

THE BODY IN THE STORY

The body is often the true subject of life writing: in illness, trauma, desire, race, gender, age, class. These themes may emerge unannounced. The Unmindful Teacher might ask, "Can we keep this piece less personal?" or "This is too raw." The Mindful Teacher asks, "What kind of container does this piece need?" or "What shape feels safest for this truth?"

They model consent. They allow silence. They know that some stories are still forming—and some may never be shared.

TEACHING TECHNIQUES FOR LIFE WRITING

- **Object stories**: Begin with a personal item. Write its history. What does it remember that you do not?
- **Map your memory**: Draw your childhood street, or a room from your past. Label it with emotions or sounds.
- **Write the unwritten**: Draft a piece titled "The thing I haven't written yet is…"
- **Third person self**: Try telling a personal story using "he/she/they" instead of "I." What shifts?
- **Imaginary letters**: Write to someone you will never send it to. Then choose: keep it, shred it, rewrite it.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM: NOT QUITE MEMOIR

I left out the middle.
The word I wasn't ready for.
But the shape of it—
you could feel it between the lines.

Sometimes what's absent
tells the truth more tenderly
than anything I said aloud.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- What stories do you carry that you've never written down? Why not?
- When do you feel most safe to write from life—and when do you feel most exposed?
- What permissions do you need to give your students before they write autobiographically?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Write about a moment when you were silent. What was happening inside?
- Describe someone without naming them. What details define them?
- Begin with: "This isn't the story I meant to tell, but…"

TEACHING ACTIVITIES

- Offer a "choice of distance" in feedback: students decide if their life writing is discussed as fiction, creative non-fiction, or not at all.
- Use the metaphor of "windows and mirrors": Is your piece something you look through, or something that reflects you?
- Host a "life writing salon" where students read a fragment aloud anonymously, and the group responds only with associations.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Before beginning a life writing session, breathe and ask:
What stories are waiting to be heard—but not forced?
Then begin gently. Let the writer lead.

CHAPTER 42: MINDFULLY TEACHING SCRIPTWRITING

DIALOGUE WITH THE SELF

OPENING VIGNETTE: THE REHEARSAL INSIDE

In a drama-writing class, the teacher gives an unusual prompt.

"Write a conversation," she says, "between two parts of yourself."

There's a pause. Then the room fills with scribbling.

SELF: Why do you always make me doubt everything?

DOUBT: Because if I didn t, you might fall flat on your face.

SELF: Or fly.

DOUBT: ...I hadn t considered that.

The students laugh. Then they fall quiet. Something real is happening.

Scriptwriting is often taught as an external practice: developing dialogue, scenes, and action for actors and audiences. But the **Mindful Creative Writing Teacher** recognises that the most transformative scripts begin with **listening inward**. Drawing on the work of **Richard Schwartz's Internal Family Systems therapy (2013)**, they invite students to engage in self-dialogue—not as confession, but as creative inquiry.

The **Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher** may treat scriptwriting solely as a performance product. Structure dominates. Characters must arc. Beats must be hit. The story is built from the outside in.

The **Mindful Creative Writing Teacher**, by contrast, treats scriptwriting as **inner dramaturgy**. They create space where students can **hear their own parts speak**—the frightened part, the joyful part, the critic, the child, the abandoned one. The aim is not performance, but presence.

CASE STUDY 1: THE ANGRY PART SPEAKS

A university student, Shazia, is blocked. "I don't do dialogue," she says. Her tutor suggests a different approach.

"Try writing a script between your angry part and your Self."

Shazia writes furiously for half an hour. She brings the piece to class. It begins:

SELF: I see you pacing. What do you want to say? ANGER: I hate that I've worked so hard and still feel invisible. SELF: I'm listening. Go on.

The class is spellbound. Shazia's voice shakes but holds steady. Afterwards, she says: "That didn't feel like writing. It felt like healing."

WRITING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Richard Schwartz (2013) describes how we all have different "parts" within us—fragments of identity, formed by experience, emotion, and need. These parts often conflict, especially when writing: the Perfectionist interrupts the Dreamer, the Wounded Child interrupts the Confident Adult.

Rather than silencing these voices, the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher helps students **stage them**. Scripts become containers for inner conversation. The "Self" takes on the role of compassionate interviewer—a calm, curious presence.

This echoes Tristine Rainer's approach in *The New Diary* (2004), where journal dialogues become a tool for transformation. It also resonates with drama pedagogy: roleplay, inner monologue, and character exploration all stem from the same root—**naming what lives within**.

THE CLASSROOM AS REHEARSAL SPACE

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher sets up the classroom as a safe stage. Not for acting, but for dialogue. They might say:

- "Write a script between the part of you that wants to write and the part that always stops you."
- "Have your present-day self interview your teenage self."

- "Let a character from your fiction confront you about how they're being written."

This work is exploratory. There are no expectations of polish. The writing may never be shared. But it becomes a powerful tool for self-awareness, compassion, and narrative depth.

The Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher may dismiss this as "therapy, not writing." But in doing so, they miss the core of creative practice: **writing is how we meet ourselves**.

CASE STUDY 2: THE SILENCED VOICE

In a writing for wellbeing group, Peter, a retired accountant, writes a scene in which his inner Critic confronts his Forgotten Artist.

CRITIC: What makes you think anyone wants to read your stories now?
ARTIST: I don t know. I just… miss being curious.
CRITIC: I m scared you ll embarrass us.
ARTIST: Then let s write it badly. Just to see.

Peter says later, "I didn't realise how much of my life I've been ruled by that voice. Giving it a character made it easier to challenge."

TEACHING TECHNIQUES FOR INNER SCRIPTWRITING

- **Parts Mapping**: Students draw or list their internal "cast": Perfectionist, Doubter, Dreamer, Inner Child, Critic, Peacemaker. Then choose two to meet in dialogue.
- **Self Interviews**: The Self asks compassionate questions: *What are you afraid of? What do you want from me?*
- **Voiced Monologue**: A single part speaks to the writer. The task is to listen without interruption.
- **Letter Scripts**: Write as two versions of self (e.g. you now vs. you at 12) corresponding about a shared memory.
- **Fictionalised Inner Scripts**: Turn an internal dialogue into a scene with characters. Let the parts inhabit a world.

FROM INNER SCRIPT TO OUTER STORY — TURNING PARTS INTO CHARACTERS

Once students have explored their **inner dialogues**, a natural next step is to **externalise** these voices into fiction. The angry part might become a tyrannical queen in a dystopia. The doubting part might appear as a shadow figure haunting a romantic comedy. The Self becomes a central protagonist trying to bring the parts into balance—or perhaps a character caught in the middle of a storm they don't yet understand.

The **Mindful Creative Writing Teacher** encourages this evolution gently. "What would happen," they ask, "if your perfectionist and your dreamer became flatmates in a sitcom?" Or: "Imagine your inner critic is a disgraced politician trying to make a comeback. Who gets in their way?"

This process allows writers to **develop characters with emotional truth**. Because they've already inhabited these voices internally, they write them not as clichés but as real, dimensional beings—with motives, fears, patterns, and depth.

CASE STUDY 3: THE SELF AS STORY

After weeks of writing IFS-inspired dialogues, a student named Lara shares a new script. It's a short play about a burned-out teacher being followed by five invisible characters—each representing part of her psyche. The "Do More" voice wears a whistle. The "I'm Not Good Enough" part clutches a report card. The "Still Me" part barely whispers but doesn't leave.

The class is stunned. It's both funny and piercing. Lara says, "I didn't plan this story—it just grew from the parts."

The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher recognises that this is more than a play. It's **narrative integration**. The inner world has become shared, shaped, and staged.

MINDFUL TRANSITIONING TECHNIQUES

- **Recast the dialogue**: Rewrite a Self–Part exchange as a real-world scene. Change names, setting, context. Let the emotional dynamic stay the same.

- **Dramatise the dilemma**: Turn an internal conflict into a plot. What external situation would force these parts into confrontation?
- **Build an ensemble**: Let your parts become distinct characters in a group—each with a goal, flaw, and secret. Map how they intersect.
- **Develop a metaphor world**: If the Self is a lighthouse, where are the other parts? On the rocks? In a boat? How does the setting reflect the psyche?

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Poem: *The Cast Inside Me*

They are all in there—
the frightened child,
the secret dreamer,
the sharp-tongued critic,
the part that still believes.

And somewhere deeper,
watching them all with kindness,
is the Self.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- What are the dominant parts of you that show up when you write? When you teach?
- How do you respond to students when their writing reveals vulnerability or inner conflict?
- What would it mean to teach scriptwriting not just as craft, but as a way of healing?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Write a script between the part of you that wants to succeed and the part that fears failure.
- Let your "Self" speak to your anxious or angry part. Keep the tone compassionate.
- Turn an emotional memory into a dramatic scene with internal parts as characters.

TEACHING ACTIVITIES

- Introduce Internal Family Systems in a gentle way—e.g. "We all have different voices inside us. Let's give them dialogue."
- Invite students to cast their inner parts and stage a silent tableau of these selves.
- Use drama techniques like hot-seating to let one part speak while others observe.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Before a scriptwriting session, ask yourself:
Which part of me needs to speak today—and which part needs to listen?
Let the page become a stage. No one is unwelcome there.

CHAPTER 43: TEXTUAL ENTANGLEMENTS AND CRITICAL CHOICE

Teaching with Interactive Fiction

In a typical classroom, words are often fixed—black ink on white paper, one line following another, each word leaning into the next like sheep herded in neat rows. But what happens when we loosen the line? When narrative becomes a series of branching possibilities, and readers must choose their own way through the story?

In this chapter, we explore how Interactive Fiction (IF) can expand creative and critical engagement in the writing classroom. Specifically, we examine how digital storytelling platforms like Twine can transform both teaching and learning, allowing creative writing to become dialogic, multimodal, and ethically charged.

Sam Holdstock's doctoral thesis *Textual Entanglements* (2024) offers a landmark study of how Interactive Fiction works in secondary English classrooms. In one example, *The Doodle*, students read a nonlinear story about a young carer whose sketch comes to life during a lesson. As the class collectively chooses how to proceed, the room becomes a site of "joyous talk"—a space where students speculate, collaborate, and analyse language without even realising they are doing so.

In *What Happens When You Close Your Eyes*, Holdstock builds a more structured IF experience based around World War I. The story is composed of interlinked vignettes that foreground marginalised perspectives, such as colonial and non-combatant experiences of the war. Through carefully designed bottlenecks and state-tracking variables, the narrative invites readers to reflect not only on character experience but on whose stories we choose to remember—and how. The emotional and ethical stakes of student decision-making become pedagogical moments of historical inquiry and empathy.

Another example, *A Great Gatsby*, positions students as F. Scott Fitzgerald himself, rewriting and reinterpreting the novel's iconic opening through a series of stylistic and grammatical choices. The aim here is not merely to produce fan fiction but to conduct "textual interventions" (Pope, 1995): playful, critical, and creative

reworkings that deepen students 'understanding of authorial craft and intention.

These examples reveal IF's unique potential: not just as a novelty or a digital gimmick, but as a powerful tool for building student agency, critical literacy, and shared ownership of narrative space.

CASE STUDY 1: THE UNMINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – MISS D.

Miss D. is a confident teacher, well liked and effective in traditional settings. Her creative writing unit begins with exposition, climax, and denouement. Students read standard literary extracts—Hemingway, Orwell, Atwood—and complete "analytical reflections" in their workbooks. They are told to stick to a genre, develop plot, and revise carefully.

When Miss D. introduces an interactive fiction piece, she projects it like a text to be analysed. She directs the class through the story one link at a time, asking questions about setting and conflict, and correcting students who veer off-script: "That's not what this choice is about. It's about irony."

Although students make choices, they do so passively, waiting for teacher approval. The potential for critical dialogue — Why make this choice? What does it mean to interrupt a narrative? — is lost. For Miss D., IF becomes another text to be mastered, not a space to experiment or dwell.

CASE STUDY 2: THE MINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER – JAMIE

Jamie opens the session by reading *The Doodle*—an IF piece written by teacher-researcher Sam Holdstock. Instead of leading, Jamie steps back. The projector shows a passage; the class reads it aloud. Jamie asks: "Which link feels most compelling to you? Why?" Students debate, argue, persuade. They debate. And click.

Each choice reveals a new path, provoking new emotions. At one point, the protagonist's jealousy surprises the group. "What made us feel that?" Jamie asks. The room hums with speculation.

Students are not just reading; they are 'meta-reading'. They discuss the architecture of the story, reflect on their narrative

decisions, and co-construct meaning in real time. Jamie describes this as "a workshop in reading as writing, and writing as thinking." This dialogic mode, as Holdstock (2024) argues, creates a "textual entanglement": a pedagogical moment where teachers, students, and texts are mutually shaping one another.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

THEMATIC STORY PROMPT

Compose a short interactive fiction piece using Twine, titled *The Choice I Didn't Make*. Allow the reader to pursue several paths, one of which remains unexplored. Leave the ending open. Let the reader feel the weight of decisions and the absence of resolution.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- What did it feel like to write a branching narrative, using hyperlinks?
- How does your writing process change when you must anticipate reader choice?
- What does IF allow you to express that linear fiction might not?
- How might IF challenge fixed ideas about narrative "structure" or "plot"?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

- What are the pedagogical implications of letting students take control of narrative flow?
- How can IF support diverse voices, experiences, and literacies in the classroom?
- What are the risks of using digital forms—technical, emotional, pedagogical—and how can they be navigated mindfully?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Use Holdstock's approach by introducing a collaboratively written IF story in class and allowing the group to make decisions together.

- Invite students to design IFs based on ethical dilemmas, social justice themes, or their own autobiographical experiences.
- Encourage dialogue: Ask students to explain and justify their narrative choices, reflecting on language, structure, and reader impact.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Before you write or teach with IF, pause. Ask yourself: *Whose story am I not telling? What choices are missing?*

CHAPTER 44: WRITING WITHOUT THE TEACHER

Trusting the Group

Peter Elbow's concept of the "teacherless writing class" reimagines how we learn to write: not through correction or authority, but through the lived experience of shared response. In *Writing Without Teachers* (1998), Elbow describes a class in which seven to twelve people read each other's weekly writing, and simply describe how the writing made them feel. "You need movies of people's minds while they read your words," he writes—not evaluations or theories, but deep, subjective witnessing.

This approach resonates with constructivist, experiential and dialogic models of learning. It echoes Freire's belief in co-intentional education, Vygotsky's emphasis on social learning, and Carl Rogers 'vision of the facilitator as a warm, authentic presence. Mindful teaching, too, prioritises process over product, trust over transmission. In Elbow's vision, the group becomes a mirror: reflecting each writer's voice back with clarity, nuance and care.

Yet teacherless models are not without risks. Without mindful facilitation, imbalances may go unchecked. Dominant voices might overshadow others, and assumptions may go unchallenged. Marginalised writers may feel silenced rather than heard. This is where the *Mindful Creative Writing Teacher* plays a quiet but vital role: not to control, but to cultivate; not to impose, but to gently guide conditions for reflective, respectful co-creation.

A hybrid model—drawing on Elbow's insights but shaped by awareness of group dynamics, learner identities, and inclusive practice—may be most fruitful. When we step back from the role of 'expert 'and lean into listening, we invite a culture of trust, reciprocity, and emergence.

CASE STUDY: THE MINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER

At an adult education centre in an urban setting, the Mindful Creative Writing Teacher introduces a "teacherless" model for the final term of a beginners 'course. The group has already built trust

through previous workshops. Now, each week, members bring in a short piece and receive responses from peers—no corrections, no grading, just felt impressions and honest reactions.

The teacher begins each session with a grounding exercise and a reminder of the listening agreements: no interruptions, no fixing, no unsolicited advice. At first, participants are nervous—some crave validation, others worry about giving the "wrong" response. But over time, the group builds confidence. One learner, Samira, who rarely spoke in earlier sessions, finds her writing taken seriously by peers for the first time. She later says, "It was the first time I believed I could be a writer—not because someone told me I was good, but because people listened."

The teacher participates as an equal—not the final arbiter, but another reader in the circle. Occasionally, they offer a brief reflective prompt or gentle mediation when tensions arise. But mostly, they hold the space: calm, spacious, and focused on trust. By the end of term, learners describe the experience as "transformative," "freeing," and "more helpful than marking."

CASE STUDY: THE UNMINDFUL CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER

In a university seminar, the Unmindful Creative Writing Teacher attempts a version of Elbow's teacherless class. However, they give no clear structure or rationale, and continue to dominate the discussion after each reading. While peers are asked to respond, the teacher's opinion clearly "counts most," and students defer to them.

Some learners feel confused and vulnerable. One writes in their journal: "We're told to be peer-led, but then the tutor critiques our work like usual. It's like we're playing at being in charge, but we're not." Without grounding or group agreements, the session feels chaotic rather than liberating.

The teacherless model collapses—not because the idea is flawed, but because it lacked mindful preparation. The teacher misunderstood "stepping back" as abdicating responsibility altogether, rather than co-creating a culture of deep listening and mutual care.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

POEM

In the Round
No one teaches the fire
how to be flame—
we sit in the warmth,
watch its dance,
tell what we see
and what we feel.
This is enough.
It burns, and we become
light.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- Have you ever experienced a "teacherless" learning environment? How did it feel?
- What helps you feel heard as a writer? What makes you shut down?
- In what ways can creative writing teachers create the conditions for deep listening?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Write a piece in which you describe your own writing through someone else's eyes.
- Imagine a writing class with no teacher. Who speaks? Who stays silent? Write a scene.
- Compose a "movie of your mind" as you read a classmate's piece. Share only what you felt and noticed.

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- What would a hybrid model of Elbow's teacherless writing class look like in your context?
- How can we ensure that all voices in a group are heard and valued?
- What role does vulnerability play in creative writing groups?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Pilot a peer-led writing circle for 4–6 weeks. Use clear agreements and mindful facilitation.
- Create listening scripts or sentence starters for feedback (e.g., "I felt…", "I noticed…", "I was curious about…").
- Integrate regular reflective check-ins to assess group dynamics and inclusivity.

MINDFUL PROMPT

Before your next group workshop, sit quietly for one minute. Place your attention on your breath. Set the intention to listen without fixing, to receive without judging. Return to this breath whenever you feel the urge to control.

CONCLUSION: WRITING AS PRESENCE

We end with a return to where we began: the classroom as a site of presence. This concluding reflection brings together key insights from the book, offering a vision of teaching creative writing as a relational, radical, and deeply human practice.

CHAPTER 45: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

WRITING THE SELF, TEACHING WITH PRESENCE

POEM: THE PIT IS THE PLACE

You stepped in,
thinking you were teaching.
But the ground gave way,
and the page fell silent.

Below, not darkness—
but depth.
A place of muddle,
of wondering aloud,
of listening before knowing.

You climbed, not with answers
but with questions.
And found,
at last,
you were writing too.

This book has not aimed to offer a method, a toolkit, or a set of definitive answers. It has offered something far more fragile, and perhaps more useful: a way of being. A way of paying attention.

If you've travelled with it, you've stepped into the learning pit. You've listened in on classroom moments where vulnerability and courage intermingled. You've met the **Mindful Creative Writing Teacher** in many guises: a guide, a fellow writer, a risk-taker, a listener, an experimenter, and, above all, a learner.

You've seen that teaching creative writing is not simply about transmitting skills or facilitating polished outcomes. It is about cultivating conditions in which people—of all ages—can begin to write *themselves* into language. It is about trusting that creativity often starts in confusion, and that authentic voice is rarely born from neat templates.

Throughout this book we have explored:

The learning pit, and how discomfort is integral to growth.

Feedback and assessment, reframed as relational, dialogic, and motivating rather than evaluative or demoralising.

Drama and embodiment, not as decorative extras, but as pedagogies in their own right—ways to inhabit language before writing it.

Culturally responsive and decolonising approaches, which remind us that creative writing must make room for multiple voices, forms, and ways of knowing.

Reflective practice, not as an afterthought but as an act of professional courage and care.

Play, risk, silence, doubt—all the unsung teachers of the creative classroom.

The **Mindful Creative Writing Teacher** walks a narrow bridge: between structure and spontaneity, rigour and release, planning and presence. They know that it is not enough to fill time with tasks or to teach writing as technique alone. They offer their own attention as the most powerful resource they possess.

They are mindful not because they are always calm, or always wise, or always right—but because they are *aware*. They notice. They listen. They adjust. They make space.

This book invites you to do the same.

A FINAL PROMPT

Before your next session, sit quietly. Ask:

What might I need to unlearn today, so that something new can begin?

Then enter the classroom—not as a deliverer of content, but as a co-creator of meaning.

Let your practice, like your students 'writing, be alive.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Francis Gilbert is the author of *The Mindful English Teacher*, a book that has influenced hundreds of teachers seeking a more caring, reflective, and creative approach to English education. With *The Mindful Creative Writing Teacher*, he continues this work, helping educators nurture writerly identities with integrity, compassion, and challenge.

Francis is also the author of *Working The System — How To Get The Very Best State Education For Your Child* (2009) and three critically acclaimed novels: *The Last Day Of Term* (Short Books/Blue Door Press, 2011), *Who Do You Love* (Blue Door Press, 2017), and *Snow on the Danube* (Blue Door Press, 2019). His bestselling *Analysis and Study Guide: Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (2013) has supported tens of thousands of GCSE students in understanding literature deeply and personally.

A TEACHER, ALWAYS

Francis taught in London secondary schools from 1991–2015, before joining Goldsmiths, University of London, where he completed his PhD in Creative Writing and Education. Since then, he has led teacher education programmes including the PGCE in English and is currently Head of the MA in Creative Writing and Education. In 2022, he became Academic Co-Director of Goldsmiths 'Connected Curriculum, helping to shape research-rich, inclusive approaches across disciplines.

A RESEARCHER AND PRACTITIONER

Francis has always grounded his work in both lived experience and rigorous research. His academic writing, public scholarship, and classroom practice are animated by ethical inquiry, deep listening, and a commitment to transformative education. His formal research, ethically approved through Goldsmiths, explores creative pedagogy, mindful teacher identity, and the ways writing can become a mode of resistance, reflection, and repair.

IN THE MEDIA

A regular contributor to national media, Francis is known for championing creative and caring approaches to education. He has

written widely for the press and appeared on major television and radio outlets. In August 2024, he featured on national TV speaking about the importance of trust, play, and real-world relevance in today's schools. He is not afraid to speak truth to power—or to speak up for young people and teachers alike.

EDUCATION AND BACKGROUND

Francis studied at Sussex University, Cambridge University, and completed an MA in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia, where he was taught by Malcolm Bradbury and Rose Tremain. He also holds a Diploma in Journalism from the London College of Printing (1998), a PhD in Creative Writing and Education (2015), and was awarded Senior Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy in 2018.

What Others Say

"A great teacher."

— *Jeremy Paxman*, BBC's Newsnight

"Clearly Francis Gilbert is a gifted and charismatic teacher."

— *Philip Pullman*, author of *Northern Lights*

"Gilbert writes so well that you half-suspect he could give up the day job."

— *The Independent*