

CREATIVE WRITING LESSON PLANS FOR POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

EXPLORING GLOBAL ISSUES



DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION THROUGH CREATIVE WRITING

LESSON PLAN – 90 MINUTES

FINDING POETIC VOICES WHILE EXPLORING THEMES AROUND CHILD LABOUR

Nessa O'Mahony

OBJECTIVE

A good way of helping students towards a more profound understanding of development education issues is to find ways to increase their empathy. By exploring individual case studies and creating creative work that gives voice to the people they are reading about, students can begin to imagine themselves in the shoes of their subject matter and thus have a more profound understanding of the issues. This class therefore teaches students how to explore characters and create voices for children caught up in child labour.

OUTCOME

Student poems on the theme of child labour.

| Time | Activity | Resources |
|--------------|---|---|
| Preparation | Bring in handouts with examples of poems that use dramatic monologues or create personae | Persona poem handout |
| 0-10 minutes | Warm-up: generating word banks – get the students to list as many words as possible that are unique to their own localities or families. Explain to them that we all have particular words or phrases that we use that are unique to us – dialect words or regional words or just words we use around the dinner table. Collect the words on a whiteboard/flipchart but ask students to keep their own lists too. | Whiteboard or flipchart to draw cluster |

| | | |
|----------------------|---|--|
| <p>10-20 minutes</p> | <p>Introduction to voice and persona: lead discussion about the voice in poetry and how it works. Read some examples of poems where objects or animals are given voices, for example, Jo Shapcott's 'The Mad Cow Talks Back'.</p> <p>Bring a list of objects/ animals and allocate one to each student – ask them to imagine what that object/ animal might say if given a voice for the first time.</p> | <p>Handouts of persona poems</p> <p>Lists of objects or animals for distribution</p> |
| <p>20-40 minutes</p> | <p>Case study: choose an example of a child labourer and tell their story. Carpet workers in India might offer one good illustration as there is much good information about the lives they live and the working conditions they experience. Cotton pickers in the Congo, rag pickers or children working in coffee plantations in Nicaragua might offer alternatives. If possible, ask the children the week before to find examples for themselves but if not, bring handouts yourself.</p> | <p>World Labour Organisation website, Trócaire/Concern websites, handouts</p> |

| | | |
|---------------------|---|--|
| 40-80 mins | <p>Get the children to divide into groups of 2-4 and ask them to write a poem in the voice of the child labourer they have been allocated. Ask for no more than eight lines of poetry, and divide responsibilities between those who develop the voice of the child labourer, and those who look at other elements of the poem, for example, rhyme, language and imagery.</p> | <p>Students should work with their own class notebooks. Make sure that collective poems are transcribed into each individual's notebook.</p> |
| 80-90 minutes | <p>Round-up: hear some of the poems drafts.</p> | |
| Before next session | <p>Students should be encouraged to work on drafts and refine them so they become final drafts.</p> | |

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION THROUGH CREATIVE WRITING

LESSON PLAN – 90 MINUTES

LEARNING ABOUT STORY STRUCTURE WHILE EXPLORING THEMES AROUND FOOD SECURITY

Nessa O'Mahony

OBJECTIVE:

We want students to learn how to tell, shape and structure stories that help them explore development education themes. The objective of this lesson is to learn the three-act structure of story and begin to develop their own stories that explore some aspect of the theme of food security.

OUTCOME:

Student stories on the theme of food security.

| Time | Activity | Resources |
|-------------|---|------------------|
| Preparation | Bring in handouts with examples of the three-act structure/story square | |

| | | |
|---------------|--|---|
| 0-15 minutes | <p>Warm-up: the story square. This is for the entire group. Draw a large square on the whiteboard and divide it into four equal squares. Ask them to suggest the hero for a story – they need to offer name, age, situation and if are they happy or sad. When the students have suggested that, fill in the details in the first square. Then in the last, fill in the same details but reverse the emotional state of the character. If happy in the first square, they are sad in the last, and vice versa. Then ask students to suggest other characters – helpers or enemies – and get them to flesh out the situation of the story: who is the hero, why are they happy/unhappy, what can they do to change their situation, what happens, what challenges them, and how it is resolved?</p> | Whiteboard or flipchart to draw cluster |
| 15-25 minutes | <p>Ask each student to construct their own individual story-square – let them decide what story they want to tell, and what hero want to create.</p> | |

| | | |
|----------------------|--|---|
| <p>25-40 minutes</p> | <p>Case study: choose an example of an issue involving food security. For example, one good case study is Malaysia.</p> <p>Between 1990 and 2005, the proportion of underweight children in Malaysia decreased from 22.1% to 7%. This was caused both by economic growth and by government and non-government campaigns targeted to women and young children. These programmes included food aid for poor families, supplementary feeding programmes for pre-school and primary-school children, micronutrient supplements for pregnant mothers, and nutrition education activities.</p> | <p>World Labour Organisation website, Trócaire/Concern websites, handouts, YouTube videos</p> |
| <p>40-80 mins</p> | <p>Get the children to divide into groups of 2-4 and ask them use the story square to draw up a plot outline for a character suggested by the case study. They should begin by filling out a story square, but then move to outlining the plot and then beginning to write the actual story. If the students can complete a joint draft story by the end of the forty-minute segment, all the better, but if not, they should at least begin the story and know where it is going to finish.</p> | |

| | | |
|---------------------|--|--|
| 80-90 minutes | Round-up: hear some of the story outlines. | |
| Before next session | Students should be encouraged to work on completing an actual story based on the story square which can be read at the start of the next sessions. | |

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION THROUGH CREATIVE WRITING

LESSON PLAN – 90 MINUTES

USING IMAGERY TO EXPLORE THE THEME OF MIGRATION AND REFUGEES

Nessa O'Mahony

OBJECTIVE:

It can be very useful to get students to think about the nuts and bolts of creative writing while at the same time exploring global themes. In the case of this lesson, the objective is to get the student to think about issues of forced migration – boat people, refugees from Syria for example – and to engage with their plight while at the same time thinking about how they might write about that plight creatively. Thus the student will also learn about how the image works in poetry, and find ways of finding the right imagery with which to explore the issue of migration.

OUTCOME

Student poems on the theme of forced migration and refugees.

| Time | Activity | Resources |
|--------------|--|---|
| Preparation | Bring in handouts with examples of poems that use imagery. | Imagery handout |
| 0-10 minutes | Warm-up: clustering exercise around the word journey. Ask the students to draw a circle at the centre of the page and choose the first word they think of in relation to journey. Then ask them to think of as many other words they can that relate to the journey. Ask them to save these words for use in a poem. | Whiteboard or flipchart to draw cluster |

| | | |
|---------------|---|--|
| 10-20 minutes | <p>Introduction to imagery: lead discussion about the image and how it works. Tell them that everything is an image. Original words come from pictures of things, for example, the word nostril comes from a combination of the word for nose, and 'thirl' – an old word for window – so nosethirl became nostril, literally the window of the nose!</p> <p>Ask the students to make a list of any thing or object they can think of that also works as an image or symbol of something.</p> <p>Take examples from every student and write up the words on a board. Ask the students to do a free association or cluster around each word on the board.</p> | |
|---------------|---|--|

| | | |
|---------------|--|-------------------------|
| 20-40 minutes | <p>Explore imagery in poetry: discuss how a good metaphor can crystallise a feeling/thought central to the poem or text.</p> <p>Powerful imagery is based in powerful observation – in being able to see things precisely and making them original through the associations you bring to them. In order to work with images, you need to train the eye, ear, touch, taste and scent to be able to fully experience and thus describe particular detail. You need to carry your notebook in the way an artist works with a sketchbook, and capture what you see as it intrigues you.</p> <p>Ask students to look at examples of poems from Ezra Pound, Denise Levertov.</p> | Poetry imagery handouts |
|---------------|--|-------------------------|

| | | |
|---------------------|---|---|
| 40-80 mins | <p>Show the students newspaper articles and YouTube videos about forced migration and refugees, for example, those taking to the sea to escape from conflict-torn Africa, Syria, etc. Ask the students to consider what sorts of images might be found in these accounts and what images could be used for the journey.</p> <p>Writing the image: divide students into four groups. Ask each student group to go back to their original clustering exercise and combine that list with the image words they have found in order to make a poem on the theme of migration.</p> | Newspaper articles, photographs, YouTube videos, news-programme reports |
| 80-90 minutes | Round-up: hear some of poems drafts. | |
| Before next session | Students should be encouraged to work on drafts and refine them so they become final drafts. | |

POETRY IRELAND DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION WORKSHOPS

LESSON PLAN

SPECULATIVE FICTION

Oisín McGann

These notes are a loose structure for a writing workshop, tackling a social issue through the lens of speculative fiction. The amount of time it takes could be anywhere from a normal class period to a two-hour workshop, depending on how much writing the students are able for. If fiction is all about asking 'what if?', speculative fiction is about asking 'what if?' without constraining your story to a real world or real circumstances. That doesn't mean there are no rules for your story; it just means you're free to set whatever rules that will work best for your story.

It can be used to introduce children to any social issue, but for this example, let's use the writing of stories as a means to provoke discussion about climate change. The principles I use for teaching storytelling are quite simple – everything is broken down into the three essential elements for a basic story; what I call the Three Ps:

- **People:** the characters – who is playing a part in this story?
- **Place:** the location or setting – where is it taking place?
- **Problem:** the challenge the characters have to overcome – what is the problem and how do they solve it? The solution of the problem marks the end of the story.

In the case of this project, the problems should be created by the weather or climate, but that still leaves a huge array of possibilities for storylines, as it's the effect of these problems on the characters that will make the most compelling stories – and there are countless affects you could write about.

These three elements are completely interconnected; the trick is to achieve the balance between all three:

- People are influenced by where they've been raised and their behaviour is affected by where they are now (you might feel or behave one way in Dublin, but a different way in Dubai), just as any place is affected by the people who live in, or pass through it.
- The place can also influence the nature of the problem and how easily it can be solved.
- The problem can, in turn, affect the place – particularly if we're talking about weather – but it also affects the people's personalities, as any dramatic event will affect their character. And how they deal with the problem depends on the type of people they are.

Put your characters in a difficult situation and let us watch as they struggle to overcome this challenge. Make those characters feel real to us, make us care about them, and you have a compelling story.

The aim of this workshop is not for the students to produce finished stories, though you might decide to go further and do so. The aim is to separate out these basic elements for them and help them understand how to use them. Each of the exercises in this lesson plan focuses on just one of these elements.

EXERCISE 1

Describe a person you know well

EXERCISE 2

Describe a character you've made up

For both exercises, ask them to describe the person's:

1. Physical appearance
2. Personality
3. What they love and what they hate
4. What they spend most of their time doing, their occupation

The aim is to get the students to describe the made-up character as thoroughly as the real person, but even with the person they know, they might struggle – it's not something they're asked very often. Weaker writers might just write a few qualities; they might even do it in bullet points. This is okay – it will still get them thinking of a character as a collection of qualities, rather than as a single role or personality trait.

Here are a few things that you can discuss as a means of getting the students to think in terms of creating characters, before they actually start writing a story. Don't expect them to have ready answers, but these questions can help you tease answers out of them.

People:

- What kinds of people are your characters?
- What do they look like?
- How do they behave?
- How are they different from each other?
- How do they speak differently from each other?
- How does the climate influence their behaviour?
- What are their occupations, their passions, their good habits, their bad habits?
- What kind of education do they have?
- What are they skilled at? What are they *not* skilled at?
- What can you tell us about their past?

-
- What are their ambitions?
 - Are they the right people to solve the problem in this story?
 - If not, why not, and what has happened to the people who could?
 - How will you make your readers care about these characters?

EXERCISE 3

Describe a place you know well

EXERCISE 4

Describe a place that you've made up

Once again, the aim is to describe the made-up place with the same fluency as the real one. Make sure they keep the descriptions in close, small scale: a room or garden rather than a city or a forest. You want the descriptions to be as intimate and evocative as possible. Ask them to describe using the five senses:

1. Sight
2. Sound
3. Touch
4. Smell
5. Taste
6. ... And also, have them describe how they feel when they're in this place.

The taste one might sound odd, but strong smells can have a taste, or you can associate certain tastes with certain places. Here are some things to think about when conceiving a location or setting for your story:

Place:

- Where have your characters grown up?
- How has it affected their personalities?
- How has it affected the language they speak?
- Where is the story set?
- Describe it using all of the senses.
- Are the characters from this setting, or from somewhere very different?
- Is the climate very different here? Is it a type of weather that is new to them, or are they used to a certain type of weather, but now it is changing?
- How have people been affected by this place? How is their behaviour different in this place to what it would be normally?
- How does the problem affect the place?
- How does the place affect the solving of the problem?

EXERCISE 5

Take the place you know well and make a change to it – one that completely changes how you feel about it

This could be a change from day to night (imagine an urban park), or a change in weather (a sports ground in sunshine and then in rain or snow) or it could be a change in the characters who show up there (you come home to find your house has been burgled). The main thing is to show how a location or setting can have different effects on us in different circumstances.

EXERCISE 6

Come up with a very basic problem and its solution

This should be deliberately easy. You're thirsty, you go to the tap and pour some water. You're hungry, you go to the fridge. You need to go to the loo, you go to the loo. You're hurt, you go to the hospital. The more down-to-earth and recognisable the problem, the better.

EXERCISE 7

Change the circumstances that this problem takes place in, or put obstacles in the way of solving it

Just by changing the circumstances, the problem can become more dramatic. You're thirsty, but you're in the desert. You're hungry, but your throat is so sore you can't swallow. You want to go to the loo, but you're in the middle of a crowd and there are no toilets nearby. You twist your ankle, but you're out in the mountains. Overcoming obstacles on the way to the solution, and doing it in a way that shows your characters' personalities and threatens failure at any point, is a good way to build a story.

Here are some points for discussion:

Problem:

- What kinds of problems is the weather causing?
- What are the solutions?
- What makes those solutions hard to achieve?
- What *can* be achieved and what *can't*?
- What obstacles do the characters have to overcome in order to succeed?
- How do you use these to build up suspense – to make the reader keep hanging on?
- Are the characters' personalities part of the problem or adding to it in any way?
- Is there any clash of personalities?
- How will you build tension to a dramatic climax by the end of the story?

The characters should be actively involved in the events of the story, their decisions should affect its course and their personalities should affect their decisions. By framing the problem within aspects of the social issue you want to deal with, and getting the students to think out how those problems will affect their characters, gets them thinking about the issue in a way that engages them and provokes questions – which in turn gives a teacher the opportunity to explore the ideas involved. Find the dramatic, compelling aspects of that issue, but also find ways they can relate to it. Even though you can do anything with speculative fiction, I tend to make them set their stories in Ireland, though it could be a future or alternative Ireland. This keeps it close to home for them, so they write about what's familiar, using what they know, and feel the issue is something that could happen to them, rather than just happening in some other place they have little or no connection with.

Once the students start putting together elements for a story they intend to finish, make sure that the story is written with immediacy – they should narrate it as it's happening, not as a news report about something they weren't involved in. Make the reader feel as if it's happening even as they read it, second by second, blow by blow.

Make the characters feel real, make the setting and problem feel real and the issue you're dealing with will start to feel more real too, less of a theoretical thing and more tangible. It makes you imagine 'what if?' and perhaps, if done right, it could make students look at people in more difficult circumstances and wonder, 'what if that was me?'

LESSON PLAN 1

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Paula Leyden

INTRO

The interrogation technique is a very useful exercise for young writers who wish to develop characters, which involves asking a series of increasingly detailed questions, the answers to which can then be used as an outline of a central character in a story. I also find this useful in Development Education, as you will see further on.

STEP 1

Ask your class to close their eyes and imagine a character that they are going to create in a story set in their home town. They keep their eyes closed while you talk them through it – tell them you want them to imagine what their character looks like, sounds like, what clothes s/he is wearing, what they like doing, etc. Then get them to imagine that this character steps out of their head, walks into the classroom and comes to sit down next to them. Now they open their eyes.

STEP 2

First they need to answer your questions on physical description:

- What is your character's hair colour?
- Is her/his hair curly, straight, short, long, dyed, tied up, etc.?
- Does s/he have any piercings?
- What is their eye colour?
- Do they wear glasses?
- Are they tall or short or medium?
- Do they have any disabilities?
- What are they wearing?
- What shoes are they wearing?

STEP 3

Then they get to interrogate their character themselves to get to know them better. I prefer to read out the questions one by one rather than giving them a sheet because this way the momentum is kept up. If they get a sheet, they will work at different paces and some will lag behind.

-
- What is your name?
 - Do you have a nickname?
 - Where were you born?
 - What is your family like? Do you have brothers and sisters? Parents? Step-parents? Do you live at home?
 - Are you happy where you live?
 - Do you have any pets? If so, what are they?
 - When you feel angry, what do you do? Do you go quiet or do you lash out? Where do you go when you get angry?
 - What is your biggest fear? Why?
 - Have you told anyone about your fear?
 - Do you have a best friend? If so, what are they like?
 - What makes you laugh out loud?
 - If I was to go and open your fridge door, what would I find inside?
 - What is your favourite food?
 - What are your favourite shoes? What kind of socks do you wear? Plain dark socks, sports socks, patterned socks, long socks, thick socks, frilly socks, etc.?
 - If I was to go into your kitchen now, what would it smell of?
 - Describe your bedroom.
 - Imagine it's Saturday twelve o'clock midday – what would you be doing?
 - Tell me about a strong memory, good or bad, that has stayed with you since childhood. Why do you think it has remained with you?
 - What is your greatest achievement so far in your life?
 - What is your idea of perfect happiness?
 - What do you most like doing? If you could choose to do anything what would it be?
 - What is your most treasured possession?
 - What is your greatest regret, something you wish you had not done?
 - What do you most like about yourself?
 - What do you not like about yourself?
 - What are the things in other people that you most admire?
 - Do you have any real life heroes/heroines? If so, who are they and why do you admire them so much?
 - Do you have any heroes in fiction or movies? Again, if so, what is about them that you admire?
 - What music do you listen to? Which singer or band is your favourite?
 - If you could change one thing about yourself what would it be?
 - What do you believe in? Do you have religious faith? If not what are your beliefs?
 - What is your dream in life?
 - If you were to die and come back as a person or thing, what would it be?

STEP 4

Based on the answer to the questions, each person then reads out their characters in the third person, as in 'my character's name is ... she is ... she thinks ... she dreams, etc.'

This initial exercise should take about an hour and a half, to an hour and twenty minutes – effectively a double period.

LESSON PLAN 2/3/4

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

Paula Leyden

INTRO

In the following lessons we will use the exercise detailed above but with characters from different countries. For this you will need access to Wi-Fi and laptops/tablets/pc's – whichever of these are available in your school.

STEP 1

(This should take one period, perhaps two depending on their research skills)

Divide your class into pairs. Allocate each pair a country in the world. Work from a list of the richest and poorest countries in the world as this provides contrast. I try to vary the countries by continent as well. Once they have their country (and make sure you give them a country that has a lot of information about it available online), then give them the following questions on a sheet. You can mix and match these questions and add your own – they are merely a guide as to the type of questions that will give the students a sense of life in the country they have been allocated.

1. How many people live in this country?
2. What is the climate like?
3. What are the main foods that people eat?
4. How many people live in the capital city and what is this city called?
5. What is the main religion?
6. Is education compulsory like it is in Ireland? At what age do children stop going to school?
7. What crops are grown in this country? Are they crops to feed the citizens or do they get exported?
8. Is it easy to grow food?
9. Does everyone have access to running water?
10. Does everyone have access to electricity?
11. What are the main industries?
12. Are there mines and if so what is mined?
13. How many people are unemployed?
14. What kind of government is there in this country? Is there a democracy? Royalty? A one-party state?
15. What is the average per capita income in the country? (for classes who have not

done economics I explain this by telling them that *per capita* is a Latin phrase meaning 'by heads', which means per person. As a diversion I get them to think of words with capita in them – decapitation, capital city, capital letter, capitalism – which had its origin in the way wealth used to be measure through ownership of heads of cattle, etc. Useful, given the discussion.)

16. Are there large families? What is the average family size?
17. What is the average life expectancy in the country (again, needs explanation in younger classes)?
18. What kind of houses do people live in? Are they different in the countryside to the city?
19. Do girls and boys go to school?
20. At what age do people get married?
21. Do both the men and women have a choice as to who they marry?
22. Find some examples of musicians from this country. What kind of music do they play?
23. What is the favourite sport of the people?
24. What clothes are worn by men and women/girls and boys?
25. Does your country have access to the sea or is it landlocked?

STEP 2

Again, once they have done this one of the pair reads the results of their research out to the class. An alternative would be that the class can ask them questions about their country – this is more interactive and I think works better. They take turns to come to the top of the class, as a pair, and are asked questions based on those above.

STEP 3

(This will probably take another double lesson but is part of the same exercise. It can be done in pairs or individually.)

Ask either each pair or each student to create a character from the country they have researched. The purpose of this exercise, apart from character development, is for the students to use empathy in their writing. They create a character who is from a country they only know through research and build that character through answering similar questions to those they used in creating a character from their own country. In addition, it will help them to understand the country by trying to see it through a character who is the same age as they are but whose life experiences maybe very different. It also demonstrates how, with globalisation, many things cross cultures.

In your introduction tell them the basis of the character: they are a boy or a girl, they are aged (insert more or less same age as your students) and they live in either the capital city of the country they have studied or in a rural area (they can choose).

The questions they will then need to answer are the following:

- What is your character's name?
- What do they look like? Hair colour? Eye colour, etc.?
- Where were they born?
- Are both their parents alive?
- If they are, do they work? What kind of work do they do?
- How many brothers and sisters do they have?
- Where do they live?
- Describe what their house looks like, inside and out?
- Do they have running water and electricity?
- Do they go to school?
- How far is their school from their home?
- How many children are there in their class?
- What is their favourite food?
- What music do they listen to?
- Who is their favourite singer/band?
- Do they play sport?
- What makes them angry?
- What makes them upset?
- What do they dream of becoming in their life?
- Who is their hero or heroine in real life? Who do they look up to and admire?
- If they could change one thing about their life what would it be?
- What does their bedroom look like? Do they share a room with anyone?
- What is their favourite subject at school, if they are still at school?
- What is their most treasured possession?
- What is their deepest regret?
- Do they have any pets?
- Who is their most favourite person in the world?

Again, you can mix and match, add in questions, as these are merely a guide.

STEP 4

What you are looking for from them is a character sketch developed from the answers to their questions. Below is an example of one done by a fifth-year student in Limerick. You will see that through the character sketch an entire story can develop.

Uganda **I am Edith** *By Chloe Hennigar*

I am Edith. I was born the 27th of July 1995. I live in a country called Uganda, in the city of Kampala which is also the capital.

I have two parents their names are Doreen and Moses. I have three siblings Grace, Florence and Isaac. Isaac is married and does not live at home but he regularly visits with his wife and child. I had a younger brother called Samuel but he died during child birth. My grandparents died two years ago during a boat trip to Kisumu in Kenya. There was flooding and their boat sank.

We live in an apartment, fourteen floors up. It has three bedrooms and two bathrooms. It is quite spacious and is very decorative. I share a room with my older sister Grace. She is twenty years old and studies at Makerere College like my father and I. I live alongside the Kitante Channel. I have running water and electricity which I am very grateful for. My favourite foods are ugali and cabbage and also roast chicken.

I go to Makerere University and I study Literature. There are fifty-seven people in my class. My father went to school and went to Makerere College to study to become a doctor, which, he became after four years there.

The climate where I live is very tropical and rains for six months of the year in two segments. There are 37,873,253 people in my country. My country has been in many wars but there is only one going on since I was born during the 'Lord's Resistance Army Insurgency'. It started in 1987 and has been on-going ever since.

My siblings and I share the housework among us. We do it before we go to college and take it in turns in between classes. Although it can be very hectic we work through it.

Between school work and chores at home I have little time for a social life. Although I am missing out on the main events for people my age, I find that I am ahead of my class with assignments. I hope to go out for my birthday this year. I will be twenty years old and I will hopefully be going out with my two best friends Grace and Jane.

In total, the exercises and research above should take you through between six to eight periods, again, depending on the ages and ability of your group.

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION THROUGH DRAMA

LESSON PLAN – 90 MINUTES

‘CREATING A CHARACTER’ WHILE EXPLORING THE THEME OF THE GLOBAL WATER CRISIS

Peter Salisbury

AIMS

- To create a fictional character using a range of drama techniques
- To generate a sequence of scenes depicting this character in a variety of circumstances and locations

| STEP | TIME | ACTIVITY |
|----------------------|--------|--|
| Warm-up | 10 min | Ten Second Objects Divide everyone into small groups (4-6). Call out the name of an object and all the groups have to make the shape of that object out of their own bodies, joining together in different ways while you count down slowly from ten to zero. Usually every group will find a different way of forming the object. Examples could be: a car, a fried breakfast, a clock, a washing machine, a mobile phone, etc. Groups can also be given a couple of minutes to devise an object of their own, which the rest of the class try to guess. You could make it a rule that after 10 seconds they must be completely frozen in position. Also, it can be fun if they are able to make objects that use movement. |
| Sound Stories | 10 min | Random Sound Story Work in small groups of 4-6. The groups are asked to come up with a selection of random sounds - with |

each member making one vocalised sound.

Each group decides on a sequence in which their sounds are made and practices it.

The groups perform their sound sequences in turn to the whole class.

The groups are then asked to make up a story in which these sounds occur - in the same sequence already decided upon.

The stories can be narrated or acted out to the rest of the class.

Improvisation

15 min

Found in a Bag

Case Study: choose an example of a child or young person affected by the global water crisis and tell their story. People living in the Global South, such as Malawi, might be a good example. If possible, ask students the week before to find examples for themselves. If not, bring handouts yourself.

Whole group discussion:

The following items were found in a bag, for example:

- A bus ticket
- A key
- A mobile phone
- A photograph
- A letter

You then ask a series of questions to elicit spontaneous responses to the items in the bag.

For example:

- What type of bag is it?
- Who does it belong to?
- What might this person be like?
- How old are they?
- Where do they live?
- What does the bag and its contents tell us about this person?
- What is the destination of the bus ticket?
- What type of key is it? Large, small, gem encrusted, shiny, old, etc.?

-
- What does the key unlock? A door, a box, a leather bound book, etc.?
 - What type of music is on the phone?
 - Who is in the photo? Where are they?
 - What is written in the letter? Is it an opened letter or is one that has yet to be posted, etc.?

The idea here is to generate as many spontaneous ideas as possible, from which students can draw upon in the following exercises.

Alternatively, you could ask the students to suggest the contents of the bag, based on their discussion on the case study above.

Note: *do not use an actual bag or objects* – the bag and its contents should be generated purely from the students' imaginations.

Setting the Scene

Small groups (3-4)

Build a sequence of short scenes around an imagined character related to the theme of global water crisis, from clues found in a bag.

15 min

(1) *Initial Ideas*

Using the objects in the bag as stimulus, brainstorm as many ideas as possible about 'Who?' 'What?' 'Where?' 'When?' and 'Why?'

Select *one* of these ideas.

Create a 'freeze-frame' depicting that moment in time.

- Thought-track each character
- Each person prepares a mini-monologue for their character

Each group shows their 'freeze-frame' to the whole class – with each character within the frame coming to life for moment and speaking their mini-monologue, then returning back into their place in the freeze-frame.

25 min

(2) *Development*

The groups can then develop the following scenes.

Introduce each scene one at a time, allowing students to work on one scene before being given the next to work on.

- I. Flashback – what happened a few minutes before the photo was taken?
- II. Flashback – the day/week/month before the photo was taken One, two or three characters can be involved in this scene.
- III. One person in role as character either writing letter.
Another person narrates (voice-over) what she/he is writing.
- IV. Split-focus – two people in role as main character and their friend sending text messages to each other (i.e. divide the ‘stage’ in half, with main character in one half and friend in the other half).
- V. What other scene or scenes do you need to link everything together?

The groups then assemble their scenes into a sequence and rehearse their piece.

Resources:

Websites, e.g. Trócaire /Concern

Handouts

Plenary

15 min

Round up and perform some of the final drama pieces.

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION THROUGH DRAMA LESSON PLAN - 90 MINUTES

‘STORIES FROM SCRATCH’ WHILE EXPLORING THE THEME OF THE GLOBAL WATER CRISIS

Peter Sailsbury

AIMS

- To enable students to understand some of the ways in which theatre practitioners use a range of drama skills, techniques and concepts to engage an audience
- To explore and realise the dramatic potential of an original story on the theme of the global water crisis
- To prepare students for independent work on realising a script for performance

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this workshop, the students should know:

- how a playwright uses drama techniques to engage an audience
- how actors and directors use drama techniques to engage an audience
- some different practical approaches they can use in approaching playwriting

By the end of this workshop, they should be able to:

- manipulate dramatic form to engage an audience
- apply dramatic techniques within a play to inform their own work
- independently explore key characters, events and themes through practical drama activities

| SECTION | TIME | ACTIVITY |
|---------|------|----------|
|---------|------|----------|

| | | |
|----------------|--------|-----------------------------|
| Warm-up | 10 min | <i>Catch My Name</i> |
|----------------|--------|-----------------------------|

A fun way of learning names. The group stands in a circle and begins by throwing a beanbag or bouncing a medium-sized ball across the circle from one person to another. Make sure people are ready to

throw and ready to catch. Eye contact is important.

Now, introduce yourself as you throw or bounce the ball across the circle: 'Hi, I'm Peter'. Once everybody has had a go, continue the game but this time say the name of the person that you are throwing to. The group should ensure that everybody receives the ball. One way of doing this is for everybody to hold one hand up until they have caught the ball, or each person folds their arms when they have thrown it.

Resources:

Medium-sized ball or beanbag

Stories from scratch 15 min

The Story Circle – *Symbolic Objects*

A powerful story is one that resonates with an audience. If members of an audience see elements of their own lives, beliefs and feelings reflected in the story being told, it will have a greater impact on them.

Students should be able to create and tell stories in a variety of ways and that have that effect on an audience. This means students will need to draw upon their own experiences, beliefs and feelings.

In drama, quite ordinary objects can hold tremendous symbolic value. This drama exercise explores the dramatic potential of using objects within a play.

Whole Group

Whole group sits in circle on floor.

Facilitator sets out several objects in a straight line.

What narrative do they suggest? What is the story?

Very different narratives might be suggested when the objects are placed in a different order. New stories are suggested by making new connections.

Ask the students to suggest possible narrative for the line of objects. After a few minutes, rearrange the objects and ask students to suggest a new narrative.

Resources:

Several objects related to the theme of global water crisis (actual objects or drawn/written on individual pieces of paper)

20 min

Small Groups

1. Students work in pairs – students within each pair take it in turns to select one object and make up and tell each other the story of why the chosen object is special to them.
2. Double up pairs to create new groups of four. Each group decides which of their four stories has the most potential for development through drama.
3. Each group then decides on the specific moment that the object appeared to have taken on a special value and try to show this in a tableau.
4. Next, each group finds a way of showing through dramatic action (role play, improvisation) what led up to that moment and to do so in a way that illuminates why it is so dramatic. Students should edit and give their story shape.
5. Groups rehearse their dramatic pieces for sharing with whole class – tableau followed by dramatic scene.

30 min

Story Theatre – Eyewitness

Case Study: choose an example of a child or young person affected by the global water crisis and tell their story. People living in the Global South, such as Malawi, might be a good example. If possible, ask students the week before to find examples for themselves. If not, bring handouts yourself.

In their groups

1. Students think of a situation related to the theme of global water, for example a crop failing due to draught.
2. Consider who could provide interesting and contrasting eyewitness accounts of the situation (e.g. a child working in field, daughter of plantation owner, etc.). Each member of the group takes on the role of one of the characters.
3. Each character formulates a personal story of the event by building on a few simple stepping-stones

(where were they, what were they doing, what did they see and hear, how did they manage to survive to tell the tale?).

4. Groups prepare a presentation of the different accounts by intercutting them together into a single dramatic piece. The four characters must sit or stand facing the audience and not relate to each other.

Resources:

Websites, e.g. Trócaire/Concern

Handouts

Plenary

15 min

Round up and perform some of the final drama pieces: tableau, dramatic scene, eyewitness piece.

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION THROUGH CREATIVE WRITING

LESSON PLAN - 90 MINUTES

‘SCREENWRITING’ WHILE EXPLORING THE THEME OF THE GLOBAL WATER CRISIS

Peter Salisbury

AIM

- To write a short screenplay focusing on the impact of the global water crisis

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this workshop, students will be able to:

- Generate initial ideas for a short screenplay
- Build a believable character from a series of creative writing exercises
- Write a short scene in which a character makes a discovery that makes a difference to that character
- Produce an outline for the first draft of a short screenplay

| SECTION | TIME | ACTIVITY |
|--|--------|--|
| Introduction | 10 min | Introductions Favourite movies/characters Most memorable movie moment/‘image’ (shot) |
| Where do Story Ideas Come From? | 15 min | Where do ideas like this come from? A film is a journey. Not only into the world of the story, but into the world of ideas. Great films contain great themes. A great film talks about our lives, our themes, our issues. Through great films, we gain insight into how our own world works and how our own lives work. |

Sometimes we feel, experience deeper emotions watching a film than those we feel in our everyday lives. It's as if a film's ideas, expressed through character and conflict, create a deeper connection with our own lives.

Discussion: where do ideas for films come from?
The answer to this is simply, anywhere and everywhere.

Where does the writer find her themes?
From life – the source of all drama.

Which comes first, character or screenplay?

There are two approaches to a screenplay.
One is to get an idea, then create characters to fit that idea.

The other way is to create a character, out of which will emerge a need, an action and a story.

All stories have one thing in common:

BEGINNING MIDDLE END

They also have:

CHARACTERS CONFLICT DEVELOPMENT

Story Square:

Find a character – what's her mood in the first square
– what's her mood in the final square? How does she get there? i.e. what happens in squares two and three?

All stories have this structure – regardless of the order in which they come and the outcome, they must represent some kind of change or development.

A very simple example: 'The Three Little Pigs'

The Characters: Three Little Pigs, Big Bad Wolf

What happens: two of the little pigs get eaten by the big bad wolf, the third outsmarts him and survives.

So:

Hero/Protagonist – is the surviving little pig

The Villain/Baddie – the wolf

Every hero needs a Baddie to overcome.

They also have a Helper.

In 'The Three Little Pigs', the third character type (the helper) is the farmer who gives the third little pig the bricks to build his house.

Task 1: Story Square

As the students to draw up their own story square for a story with a hero, a baddie and a helper – the hero will be happy or sad in the first square and unhappy or happy in the last square – how did that happen?

Building a Character 30 min Without a character there is no story. As well as wanting to know *what* the story is about, we want to know *who* it is about. We need a protagonist to empathise with, someone to identify with for the duration of the story.

So where does the screenwriter start?

How do they create a convincing character?

A good film character always has some kind of internal conflict. A film character without a problem to solve quickly becomes unbelievable and boring. If the character suffers no conflict the screenwriter will find them hard to write. These conflicts will also give the characters a perspective on the world.

What makes a film character interesting is not the way that the world has an impact upon the character, but the way the character has an impact on the world. If all the screenwriter is doing is describing things that happen to the character, they will remain passive. The screenwriter must get their character doing and saying things in an active way. They need to have reasons, motivations and conflicts.

Characters evolve through being tested by the events of the story. They are in one state of mind at the start of the film, and a different state of mind by the end.

To do this you must know your character inside out, and have all their details at your fingertips. It is only when you know how your character is expected to

behave that you can then place them into testing environments and situations. That will make them think or act in a way they didn't expect.

Case Study: choose an example of a child or young person affected by the global water crisis and tell their story. People living in the Global South, such as Malawi, might be a good example. If possible, ask students the week before to find examples for themselves. If not, bring handouts yourself.

Ask the students to think of character related to the theme of global water crisis, such as a child whose father's small plot of farm land desperately needs an irrigation system, or a child who helps her mother fetch water four times a day from a nearby river, or one of the children or young people featured in the case study.

Task 2: Baggage

Ask the students to start by giving their character something in which items can be carried: a backpack, a handbag, a plastic carrier bag, etc. Start listing items/objects off the top of their head. List the first ten things they think of, no matter how random these items may seem. When they have finished, they can look over their lists and create a character based on some or all of those items.

Then ask the students to look at each item in their lists and say:

- Why it might be there
- When it was last used
- Any memories associated with it

The aim here is to let each item on their list draw out more detail about their character.

Task 3: Big Dream

What does their character dream of having more than anything else in the world?

Task 4: Histories

Characters, like real people, have histories: from families and places to ideas about the world. The students will now write an imagined history for their

character. Ask them to ask their character twenty questions about themselves. Be sure to ask open questions, not questions that give yes or no answers. The students write down their character's answers.

Task 5: Dialogues

Draft a scene in which their protagonist has a conversation with a friend.

**Dramatic
Technique**

20 min

Discoveries

The best stories are patterns of discoveries that make a difference, however subtle, to the characters. We need to witness watershed moments in the characters' lives, witness discoveries that force the energy system of their life and emotion to flow in a different direction.

The precise moment of change must be clearly rendered on paper so that it ends up on screen.

We must *see* the discovery happen and *feel* its emotional impact.

Learning to craft a convincing, significant discovery is one of the most important aspects of dramatisation you need to master.

Task 6: Drafting a script

Draft a short sequence of scenes depicting a 'discovery' – in which the character makes a discovery that makes a difference to the character.

The precise moment of change must be clearly rendered on paper and therefore on screen.

Remember: film is a visual medium, so the discovery must happen on screen.

The audience must understand the difference the discovery makes to your character. They must be able to see the shift, however subtle, in the character's life.

Plenary

15 min

Working in groups, the students prepare a rehearsed reading of their scripts.

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION THROUGH LITERATURE

LESSON PLAN 1 – FINDING OUR VOICE

Pete Mullineaux

OVERVIEW OF THE LESSON

This lesson (and the two that follow) focuses on the **importance of having a voice and using it to our best ability**. Firstly, we want to appreciate the fact that as human beings we all have a voice and can communicate our thoughts and feelings to others, and how this underpins our sense of communality and global interconnectedness. Secondly, we want as individuals to engage with our own particular voice, becoming more familiar with it and learning how to **extend our range of articulation and communication**, orally and **through creative writing**. Later on in this lesson, we aim to discover another, as yet unknown voice.

PREAMBLE/PREPARATION FOR WRITING

Ask the class to put their hands over their mouths. While they are doing this, ask them to imagine that they had to be like that for a whole day. Then a week. Then a year. A lifetime.

Ask them to take hands away. Tell them that there are places in the world right now where if you said what you are thinking, feeling, what you believe in out loud, you could be beaten, tortured, imprisoned, killed.

Discuss repression and intolerance.

Point out that this varies in terms of place, e.g. areas where a girl cannot say aloud that she wants an education without being punished.

It also varies over time – in Ireland not so long ago you could not speak Irish out loud without punishment.

Think about all those who may speak out but will never be listened to – the billions of poor people, children, women, the powerless, in local contexts of family, relationships, tribe, but also in the global context of those who do not have power and influence.

So having a *voice* is pretty important and a basic human attribute. For those of us who do not suffer from the situations outlined above, do we sometimes take this amazing gift for granted or not fully use our voice?

Perhaps there are situations when we do not feel so free to speak out. Have we ever felt we should have said something but didn't? Because we were afraid of being the only one to speak up, or being isolated, mocked, snubbed, ignored or told we're wrong, not good enough. This can apply to our writing voice as well as our speaking voice.

So this lesson plan is firstly about identifying our own voice, and owning and enhancing our use of it. Although we can articulate our voice through speech, for this project we are focussing on writing, though the two are linked of course. What we write we can then say aloud – we can speak it, sing it, rap it, chant it, shout it, whisper it. Later we can explore how different voices connect.

What matters is that we can get what is on the *inside, out!*

GLOBAL ISSUE: CHILD LABOUR

WRITING FORM: prose portraits/diary entries

NOTE: If this lesson is used at the end of a Poetry Ireland project the children may have explored a range of different forms of writing: prose, song, dramatic writing, as well as various poetic styles. They may have already written empathetic portraits and diary entries for child labourers. But in case they haven't, it is worth outlining the writing process here. Also the writing challenge to come later in this lesson, based on discovering a lost and unknown voice from fragments, will probably be new to them and should offer a further opportunity to extend their level of understanding and range of articulation.

To begin with we can prepare for any creative writing challenge by tuning into our imagination, this second wonderful gift we have as human beings that combines so well with our voice. Imagine that whoever the mystery owner of the diary is, or was (are they still alive?), they had so much to say about their situation, who they are, what is going on as they write, what has happened to them, who or what is around them – maybe they are stuck in one place, e.g. a confined workplace, refugee camp – they want to tell you the tiny detail and to bring their 'scene' to life.

How do we find the detail, when this person's situation is largely outside our own experience? We must work from our own experience and then employ our imagination.

Let's begin with giving our five senses some exercise.

Try this as a whole class:

Everyone close their eyes and picture a field. Engage the senses one at a time. Start with sight. Ask them to say what they see out loud. Take one child's contribution, e.g. a tree. Probe, get them to employ adjectives to describe the tree. Ask them about the bark – is it rough or smooth? Is the tree small or tall? Is it in leaf or bare? (What does the answer tell us about the season?) Any birds in it? Or nests? Probe for more detail. Try another contribution. Grass: is it long or short (again, the answer suggests the season)? On the other hand, why is it short? (Maybe it hasn't grown yet, or alternatively it may have been just cut.) Bring in movement – what is the grass doing, e.g. swaying. Someone says 'cow' – ask what colour, any calves around, etc.? Gently probe for more detail. Now go through the other senses: what can they hear in their field? Remember, each child is experiencing a different field in their imaginations; they don't have to match up with others. Do the same for smell, taste and touch.

You can also ask them to consider if *they* were in this field what might they be *feeling*?

What atmosphere is being created by the choice of words: is this field exciting, scary, calm, ominous, magical?

What might someone in the field be *thinking*?

ENGAGING THE SENSES IN REVERSE ORDER

We can do the same imaginative exploration with ‘a cave’ but this time we are going to do it differently by engaging our senses in reverse order. Again, ask the class to shut their eyes. Their eyes are no use anyway in this instance because the cave is pitch-dark. But there is a *smell*. Ask them to call out smells that pop into their heads (you might get ‘damp’ or ‘fire’ or ‘the sea’, etc.) Remember each person is in their own imaginative cave. Now add *touch*: whoever is in the cave puts out a hand and touches something (rock, fur, bones, damp?)

Now there is a *sound* (a bat, drip-drop of water, someone else breathing). See how we’re building an atmosphere for the cave, drawing the listener into something scary, exciting, magical, puzzling, etc. Finally, the eyes get used to the darkness and we *see* something – what?

We could even try some opening sentences. ‘There was a smell of damp. Ciara put out her hand and felt something cold and rough. There was a sound of small scuttling feet nearby...’

See how we’ve been brought, through the senses, immediately into the centre of a story that is happening, and already up and running. There is no preamble, which makes us curious and questioning. We want to know who Ciara is, how old is she, how did she get in to the cave, is she alone, does she want to be there? Having explored through the senses, we might give her a thought: ‘How long had she been in the cave? She couldn’t remember.’ Note how so far we haven’t said how she is feeling – perhaps we don’t need to, given the information we have so far we can *imagine* how she is feeling. So far Ciara is a bit of a mystery.

Now let’s come back to the CHILD LABOUR THEME

We are going to apply what we did above with the field and cave to a sweatshop, jungle, rubbish dump, stone quarry, goldmine, banana plantation, etc. Here the teacher might introduce actual photos or newspaper cuttings. There are lots of images online. During the workshops they might have already seen photos of child labourers in the above situations, as well as pictures of homeless people, refugee camps, people queuing for food, bombed out buildings. All of this is useful as research and stimulus to inform what they are going to write about. The teacher should know the definition of child labour (according to the International Labour Organisation IPEC), and also familiarise themselves with the term ‘bonded labour’ and be able to explain it to the children. One startling statistic to draw on is that the cost of putting all those millions of children worldwide into full-time education would cost the same as what western Europeans spend on ice cream in one year.

But information can only get us so far. Being in one of these unhealthy, oppressive and

often dangerous situations is most likely outside our personal experience. But we can use our imaginations to turn that familiar field into a banana plantation, or the cave into a dark, inhospitable, windowless sweatshop.

Choose one of the situations listed above, e.g. children working down a mine or on a dump, then shut your eyes and 'see' (as well as hear, taste, smell, touch) what is there. Again, probe them to seek more detail. Detail is paramount – it's like painting a picture, but with words. We need to fill the whole canvas as much as possible. Helpful hints from the teacher might be:

(i) Identify big things, e.g. the sky, the whole room, the size of the stone quarry; but also small details, even tiny things like a small crack in the plaster on the wall or a pimple on the boss's nose. Consider how these things loom 'larger' when viewed repeatedly day after day.

(ii) Use the eye like a camera – as if you're making a documentary film. Take in the whole room/dump/quarry/mine/jungle, then zoom in on something small like a child's fingernails, a bird in a tree, a chink of light.

(iii) The scene may include objects but also people, animals or other things that are alive.

(iv) Remember this is not a 'still life'. Even if the person in the scene is very still and restricted in movement, there will still be breathing, a heartbeat, the drip-drip of a leak in the roof. So allow the scene to move and for things to be happening. If this is a portrait or self-portrait, then it is a moving portrait.

FIRST WRITING CHALLENGE: PROSE DIARY ENTRY – A DAY IN A LIFE

The important thing to remember is that this person has something important, perhaps even life-saving to say and a story to tell. Instead of being a mere statistic – just one of 200 odd million child labourers globally – this number/statistic is being brought to life, so therefore much harder to ignore. You might start by giving them a name and age: 'Hello world, this is Maria. I'm 10 years old, I live on a dump. Let me tell you about my life...'

So remembering our original intention, part of what we are doing is giving someone an identity and a voice, and helping them to tell their story because they can't. We might be wondering now, what happened to them? We care. We experience empathy and concern. These aspects of the learning experience are key foundation stones in developing global citizens and underpin the values that we hope to nurture in the whole 'Dev Ed through Literature Project'.

EXTENDING AND DEVELOPING THE DIARY ENTRIES

As well as giving detail of an ordinary or typical day for this person and establishing them in their surroundings, you can decide to introduce a dramatic event, something unexpected and out of the daily routine, e.g. the child finds something unusual on the dump. Maybe it's a special day like the child's birthday.

Keep asking, what is this person thinking about, what are they feeling? Add that into the diary.

The teacher can encourage the class while they are writing to *write without fear of making a mistake*, and that this is all about the imagination, not about having the 'right answer'. We are exploring something we are not sure of but would like to know and understand better.

Once they have begun, just keep encouraging them to shut their eyes, picture the situation and add more and more detail.

After the portrait/diary entries are written they can read them out loud in class. Encourage mutual respect and support when listening. We are sharing and pooling experiences taken from our imagination and asking others to tune in and use their imagination to see what we see, which requires focus and attentiveness.

WRITING CHALLENGE TWO: MOVING FROM PROSE INTO POETRY

Let's first of all tackle that old chestnut: what is a poem and does it have to rhyme? The answer is only if they want it to. Ingredients we will want to consider are rhythm (linking to how the poem 'sounds') and the visual shape/pattern of the poem on the page.

One important consideration when making a poem is that we can choose not to fill in the whole canvas and leave at least some blank spaces. This is generally a good thing in poetry, it leaves room for mystery, for the reader to do some filling in themselves. But we do still need some detail – although there is an extra focus now on quality as well as the quantity in our selection of information.

Generally, a 'good' poem invites the reader to participate, do some work and be *actively engaged*. A 'not so good' poem leaves the reader with nothing to do – there is no space, no gaps to fill in with the imagination. This is one of the reasons why poetry texts are usually surrounded by more blank space than you get with prose.

What do we mean by quality rather than quantity? Imagine for a moment you are simply telling someone over the phone everything you did over the weekend in lots of detail, leaving nothing out. Have you ever been on the receiving end of this? Supposing the listener said: 'Stop! Can you make that into a poem!' What would they mean?

Ask the class for their thoughts.

Here are some suggestions: make it less long-winded, condense the information and use colourful language, rhythm and perhaps rhyme to make enjoyable sound patterns. Ask the listener to participate by putting the images into 'code', e.g. metaphor – even a few similes mean they have to think and do some work to 'get it'.

Similes and metaphors? Depending on their age range the class may or may not be familiar with these. So let's look at an example of a poem, 'Barcodes', that uses metaphor, (taken from my collection *A Father's Day*.)

Bar Codes

Each Zebra
has a distinctive stripe pattern –
a survival mechanism,

when lions attack
and the hooves scatter –
for a split sec
 ond

the swirling shapes are
 too mes merising
 for selection

of any o

ne

in di vi du al...

A lion
is only faster
over a short distance

by the time
it makes a choice
the zebras are

moreoftenthannot

gone.

I'm thinking this
as I stare down
the supermarket aisle,
trying to remember
what I came in for...

Invite the class to discuss three of the things we have already talked about in this workshop.

- 1) Where is the empathy in the poem? Is the speaker identifying with the zebra or the lion, or both?
- 2) Identify the metaphor. What work does the reader have to do to 'get it'?
- 3) Observe how metaphor operates as a form of 'code' to be deciphered.

I think we've talked enough. Now, time to write and then share those poems!

DIFFICULTY GETTING STARTED?

Some children, despite all the encouragement in the world, will still be hesitant in committing their thoughts to paper. Getting started can be the hardest thing. The mantra I keep repeating is: don't worry about getting it 'right' – *write it*. The hesitancy often comes from the mistaken belief that the poem has to come out in one continuous flow, one thing following logically from another, or that you're expected to know the whole poem before you start to write it. A different approach is what I call '**gathering a poem**'. Begin by just brainstorming and gathering material. Write down anything and everything that pops into your head: words, phrases, thoughts, feelings, questions, information from the senses. This can be rough work, such as in a spider diagram with 'child labourer' or the more specific location, e.g. 'sweatshop' at the centre of the web. Next, take this material and place it on a page, in the usual way for a poem, not worrying about which order it comes in, or if you're mixing short and long lines. Read it out loud. It may seem not much more than a list of unconnected things. But now at least you have something to play around with. You can think about making alterations, e.g. you might decide to move something at the end up to the front to make a better and more striking opening. Many poems by established poets are built on simple lists. Remember too that a poet like the late Seamus Heaney would do many drafts of a poem before he was satisfied, so again, don't pressurise yourself into thinking it all has to come out perfectly and complete in one go.

WRITING CHALLENGE THREE: DISCOVERING ANOTHER UNKNOWN VOICE FROM FRAGMENTS

A NOTE HERE ON INCLUSION

The approach we are now going to take is great for kids who are already confident and articulate in their writing, but it is also a novel way in for those who are less assured and might still feel wary or even intimidated by the blank page and the challenge of having to produce something original from their own heads. We have already talked about how some children, despite all the encouragement, might still have found the previous two writing tasks a challenge. Here the common complaint of 'I've got nothing to say' is bypassed.

Let us imagine that this time *the poem or story is already written – by a person as yet unknown*, in which case our participation as writers is closer to being an explorer, archaeologist, detective. Our role involves a different kind of work: to find out what is already there, what has already happened, already been written. It's like when someone discovers a lost fragment of a poem by an ancient Greek writer, as with Sappho recently, and the experts try to imagine what the rest of the poem might have been. Or think of it as a jigsaw where you only have five pieces and have to imagine what the whole picture was. Or pieces of a pot – imagine what the whole shape was.

If we leave the Dev Ed to one side just for a moment...

In a regular creative writing session, this writing challenge can be set up by

a) The teacher offering the 'fragments' written on the board. This has the advantage of allowing the teacher to insert key words that are pertinent to any theme they are seeking to explore with the class, e.g. bullying. Also the teacher can ensure a mix of nouns, verbs, adjectives. Also resonant words like escape, challenge, friend, hope, fear, may contribute directly to the theme, but neutral words can also be potent – door, journey, pathway.

b) Or the class can get into pairs. Each pupil writes down five words, of their choice – don't interfere! They pass them to their partner who writes down five words that respond to those words (word association) so that each now has a total of ten words. It's important to tell them that this second part doesn't have to be logical – if your partner has written 'red' for example, then you might write 'nose' or 'face' or 'tomato' or 'sunset', etc. But then again someone might write 'wheelbarrow' or 'umbrella' – that's okay too. Trust it!

Either way each child now has ten fragments of a hypothetical lost poem or story, written by someone as yet unknown to them. The challenge is to rediscover the whole thing and hopefully something about the author.

Remember we are only guessing – there can be no judgement in terms of right or wrong and no-one knows the right 'answer'. The fear of making a mistake should not apply.

NOW LET'S RETURN TO OUR DEV ED

Going back to our introduction to this lesson, imagine someone, child or adult, who *really* didn't have a voice. This person had a story to tell, but it was too difficult/dangerous for them to say it out loud. So they wrote it down. But this too was risky. Picture a child in a precarious situation, such as in our portraits: in bondage, exploitative domestic service, working in a sweatshop, child soldier. If the boss, head of the family, troop leader found your piece of writing, if it criticised *them* or made out you were unhappy, you'd be punished. How might the writer have tried to get around this?

- a) The poem/story was written in small pieces and then hidden in different places, so that even if one or two pieces were lost forever, a few pieces might not.
- b) Written in code. This could take the form of metaphor or irony to disguise a hidden inner-meaning: someone who is sensitive to looking deeper, would understand, e.g. 'My boss is so kind he stops me from playing outside where I

might get hurt.'

- c) Or maybe the message has faded –perhaps it was in a bottle at sea and only a few words can still be read.

Invite the class to offer further suggestions.

MAKING UP THE WHOLE POEM OR STORY FROM FRAGMENTS

Let's make the task really extreme. Imagine that for some reason the writer has been forced to limit themselves to only three words. Why? Perhaps they only had a tiny bit of paper to write on. They had only a brief moment when they could write in secrecy. There was only a tiny gap to poke the paper through.

STAGE 1

Sit in groups of three (identify each child as a/b/c.)

Each of them writes down

- 1) a colour
- 2) a thing/noun, e.g. tree, house, sky, hand
- 3) a verb, e.g. moving, flying, walking (anything with 'ing' on the end.)

This *must not* change once they've written them down.

Now the teacher takes the first group of three pupils and asks for person a's colour, person b's noun and person c's verb. This way we get a random combination, e.g. red chair floating, blue cat laughing.

This has the advantage in terms of creative potency of being:

- a) genuinely random
- b) original – probably no one from Shakespeare to Heaney may have said 'pink hosepipe jumping!'
- c) strange/mysterious/challenging/intriguing/quirky/surprising – all qualities of what are often the most interesting pieces of writing.

Remember the magic generated by a poem like 'The Whisperers' by Walter De La Mere – where it's so important that we're not told who the whisperers are or who the rider is – we just get enough hints and clues to make it highly intriguing, atmospheric, and what suggests itself to be an amazing story, but with stuff missing.

Of course, one response might be – yes, but also frustrating! Why didn't the writer tell us straight what it was all about!

Well, in this workshop we have already suggested some good reasons.

Going around the class, the teacher asks each group of three children to identify their

shared three-word phrase. This way the whole class can enjoy the mystery and challenge of what can sound like very odd and nonsensical word combinations!

It is very important at this point that each group of three children is not allowed to discuss what they think their shared phrase might mean and make hasty collective decisions. This would defeat the whole purpose of the following exercise.

STAGE 2

Go back to original seating: each child must now individually use their imagination to try and infer or piece together what the whole poem or story was, working from these random three words. You can think of it as three fragments of a broken pot. Put the pot back together. Or rather put the 'plot' back together!

Each child can decide if it comes out looking like prose or a poem: either is fine.

Here are some things to bear in mind from what we have discussed so far:

They (the original unknown writer) wrote in a context of fear. You however must write *without fear*. There is no right or wrong. No one can judge what you come up with. The true story may never be found. You can only *guess*, using your imagination.

Bear in mind that the original author of this piece might be a child who perhaps hasn't been able to go to school, through poverty, gender, war, etc. So it doesn't matter if words are spelt wrong, grammar is incorrect, or the writing is 'spidery'. In fact, this allows it to be more realistic and authentic.

We have looked at how metaphor works in 'Barcodes' but individual words can also carry symbolic meaning. Words for colours are particularly resonant. If we say red, we might immediately think of what we associate with red – anger, embarrassment, danger, blood. Looking at the phrase from above, 'red chair flying', we the detectives might ask, *why* the chair is red – is it angry, dangerous, bloody, hot? This should be a big clue to why it is 'flying'? Remember the task is to make sense out of what might appear at first like nonsense, after all, the writing is in 'code'.

We might also ask, what *is* the chair? Is it actually a real chair? Maybe it represents a person not a thing. Maybe the person speaking *is* 'the chair'. It is they who are angry, hot, bloody. Or maybe the chair is something or someone else in the scene connected to the narrator, or someone or something nearby that is angry, hot, dangerous?

Now we're getting somewhere! Is what the chair doing (flying) then a response to this feeling? How would being angry, embarrassed, bloody, link to flight or escape?

So – now 'red chair flying' starts to make some sense, even if it is still sounds somewhat strange. But it's intriguing, it makes us curious. The American poet Emily Dickinson once said, 'Tell the truth but tell it slant.' What did she mean by that? And how does it apply to what we are doing here. Ask the class.

Anyway, our next task is to imagine the rest of these poems or stories that these so far unknown people have written and to recreate them.

One helpful thing to consider is that the three words can be repeated as often as desired in the piece, along with all the other words the child chooses to add in. The three-word phrase could be used as a title, or perhaps be the opening line?

The poem or story might continue elusively, still 'in code', e.g. The red chair is flying, the blue birds are crying as the yellow morning appears, as it always does...'

Or they can be more prosaic in style and offer a decoded explanation from the start. For example, under the title, 'Red Chair Flying': 'Mira is a young girl working in a carpet factory. She is a child labourer and she has just cut her finger on the sharp thread and it is bleeding. She is afraid the boss will notice and take the sulphur from the head of a match and put it in the cut and light it to seal the wound so blood won't get on the carpet and ruin it. "I wish I could fly out of here," she is thinking.'

NB The above does actually happen in reality.

After the pieces are written, read them out in class. Just share the poems and stories. Enjoy the imaginations of others. Don't judge.

STAGE 3 – SHARING AND COMPARING

Each group of three can now compare their responses to the three words they originally shared. Are there any common links between the outcomes? Did they by chance tap into a common message?

STAGE 4 – CONCRETE POEMS

This is optional – you could leave this writing challenge for another day as it can make a completely separate lesson. It offers an opportunity for developing another writing skill but also a way of reflecting on what has already been achieved in the learning process.

WRITING CONCRETE POEMS

Explain to the class that this involves matching the shape of the text of the poem on the page with the theme/content of the poem. For example, a poem about a vase or egg timer might have long lines at start, getting shorter to only a few or even one in the middle then expanding again, so that the text of the poem looks like a vase or egg timer on the page. Imagine a poem about a snake, or a tree.

Bring this back to the context of the piece you have written. Where is it set? If it's a poem about a child working on a dump, maybe the words are just 'dumped' on the page in a pile – not in neat rows the way we usually write. Maybe the pile has lots of the same word, e.g. 'rubbish' but a key word or two is hidden in there, almost lost but it can be found if you look hard enough, such as 'rats' or 'Help!' Maybe the child in a stone quarry arranges the words like stones, a message to be read from above. A child in a sweatshop weaves a message into a carpet.

This time when sharing the poems in the class, pass them around so the patterns and shapes on the page can be seen.

LESSON PLAN 2: OUR FELLOW SPECIES AND OUR PLANET

DEVELOPMENT THEME

This time we will be looking at our relationship to other species on the planet – linking to our interaction with the environment and the impact of climate change. This theme was suggested to me by pupils during a recent residency, who were particularly concerned with cruelty to animals.

This lesson can stand alone thematically but it will also build and follow on from the last one – linking our work on having a voice, empathy with other points of view and giving a voice to the voiceless, in this case animals. Again, we must emphasise that this is going to be work involving imaginative exploration. We will be making things up, being fanciful and creating new ideas – we cannot begin with having neat, off-the-peg answers which close off enquiry.

This will mean considering some broad questions. What is our relationship with other species? How do we justify our actions as human beings? What are the links between our often destructive and exploitative attitude to our fellow creatures and our treatment of the rest of the physical/natural world? How does this link to climate change?

Let us remind ourselves that because this is development education through literature, we will be empowering ourselves in our response to these issues, and developing our understanding of the world alongside extending our voice and range of articulation, through creative writing.

STIMULUS

Let's start with a stimulus, something to get our teeth into and focus debate: a poem.

Requiem

The cows have gathered in an adjacent field,
I can see their shapes in the moonlight –
a meeting of the tribes, they are here in their multiplicity;
black, brown, black and white – some all-white,
like ghosts, or recent converts.

Just now I heard a moan from one of them
that had me awake as if I had been shot.
It's the night before their calves are taken,
they know from the look in the farmer's eyes.
They call him by name

although it sounds like ‘moo’ to us.

I listen at the window to their keening –
we make recordings of whales and dolphins,
say they are a higher species
as close to us as nature gets –
but the cows are singing in their camp,
refusing to be cattle
marking their loss
celebrating the grass
thanking the rain.

The females, even the males most of the time
are gentle, considerate, abiding.

But tonight the cows have run out of patience,
can ruminate no longer; they sing
their mass; make ready for battle,
tomorrow they will paint themselves red –
attack.

‘Requiem’ is from my collection *Session*, in which there are several poems that give a voice and consider the point of view of non-humans: cows, dogs, insects, birds, starfish. NB I often use my own poems in classes as I can tell them first-hand how the poem came to me.

Before reading the poem ask the class to listen attentively.

Afterwards, ask them what they think the poem is about. You can prompt by asking them to recall the last word, ‘attack’. Someone will say that a war is going on. Tease this out. Who is fighting who? Is it a real ‘battle’ or is it one-sided? Does the cow side ever win?

We’ll come back to this in a moment but for now let’s also look at *how* the poem is written. The poem is trying to look at things from a cow’s point of view, imagine what it is like to be a cow, exploring their relationship with the environment and with humans.

Consider the style of the poem. Does it rhyme? What poetic devices are used? Are the cows compared with anything? Are they ‘humanised’. Discuss the word anthropomorphic.

Is the poem sympathetic to the cow’s situation? What stance does it take re human beings represented by a) the farmer b) us, the consumer of meat?

Explain/explore the word, ‘requiem’. Why is it the title of the poem?

What is our attitude to animals?

Historically our belief is that animals and all creatures are like the environment and are there to be used by us humans. Where does that belief come from? Is this view justified?

Who made up that story, a person or an animal? Give the class some examples of the destruction we have done to other species, including complete extinctions, e.g. the dodo, passenger pigeon.

Link this to how our current behaviour continues that pattern, e.g. destruction of animal habitat through clearance of forest and jungle to enable vast palm-oil plantations. (Not to mention victimisation of people in this process.) You can also link this to environmental disaster and climate change. A recent example might be the catastrophic forest fires in Indonesia, caused by the drying up of trees and soil to facilitate palm-oil production, creating more carbon emissions than the entire US economy!

Look at the different ways in which we exploit/damage/hurt animals.

- a) We eat whatever we want for food. Note how our choices vary globally and how what appears 'natural' and 'normal' is in fact culturally relative: you can't eat cows in India or pigs in Israel, we don't like to eat horse or snails but the French do. We feel outrage at the thought of eating cats and dogs, but it's perfectly okay in parts of Asia. The common denominator is people decide the rules.
- b) For sport or entertainment, including the shooting of rare species. Investigate current species that are under threat?
- c) We use them as work animals such as horses, dogs, elephants, camels to service our needs.
- d) Cruelty in how we treat animals such as for testing of products and the slaughter of animals just for their tusks, horns, etc. But also the 'normal' cruel way in which we cage animals and use chickens, pigs, black bears to milk their gall bladders.
- e) Pure cruelty with no end in mind other than to hurt, e.g. cruelty to animals using fireworks.

Go through the rationality of the argument that justifies our behaviour. Say you are not imposing a point of view, but just questioning. Do not put down or dismiss pupils' comments. Be honest – if you eat meat, admit it. (I do but only if it's free range, which I agree is only a partial and probably inadequate response to all of the above.) Be open to how you yourself feel ambivalent about this topic. Remember, you too are exploring.

We might also bear in mind that we tend to see animals as 'higher' or 'lower' – either because of their apparent intelligence, brain size, or that they are in some way 'noble' or top of their food chain. We have a certain respect for say dolphin intelligence that we don't have for sheep, or for lions who are considered brave and noble.

ALIENS ARRIVE!

To explore and challenge this further, consider the point of view of a hypothetical alien race, who arriving here on Earth, see themselves as infinitely more advanced than us – in fact, the gap between them and us is the same as between us and cows.

What can we say in our defence if they want to cage and then eat us? Do we have a 'leg to stand on'?

How do we protest and argue our case for not being eaten? Follow the logic through step by step – involve the class in this debate. I have found that everyone wants to talk and

say their piece.

NB The openness of this discussion is central to our exploration. Let's remind ourselves that the over-arching focus of these workshops is finding and extending our voice, so this vocalisation of thoughts and feelings in class is integral to the process.

Establish ground rules for discussion:

Make sure the ground rules for this and any discussion are clear. We listen respectfully to all contributions and value them all. We (including the teacher) do not dismiss a POV or simply put it down. Our response can be 'Yes, and...' or 'Yes, but...' The important thing is we acknowledge what we have heard before saying our own piece.

WRITING CHALLENGE

Stage 1: PROSE DIARY ENTRY

Using empathy we will try and put ourselves into the shoes (hoofs, trotters, claws) of another species. As with the previous lesson on child labourers, we might start using the writing form of a diary entry (a day in the life) so we get to know their everyday ongoing issues, challenges, etc. Invite the pupils to use perspective: how does an eagle see the world, or a mouse, a fish? Consider their senses: maybe this animal has different abilities to us (e.g. it relies more on smell, hearing to get around.) Bring your animal to life, exploring its territory/world.

What does it eat? What does it do with its time? What helps it? Does it have a solitary life or live as part of a group? What are its daily challenges? What is against it?

How can we make this description rich in language? First focus on the things that occupy its world. Keep asking yourself, has my animal character forgotten to mention something in telling their story?

Now adjectives: add at least one adjective for each thing/noun, e.g. tall tree. But why stop there? Try two adjectives: tall tree with rough bark. And why stop there?! 'Tall tree with rough bark, full of songbirds.'

See how you are painting a picture with words and filling the canvas. For the movement of the animal, you can say *what* it does, (verbs) but also *how* (using adverbs.) Have fun with words: 'my movements are side to side, I travel slitheringly...'

I find that *once they have started to write* and broken through any fear of the blank page, you can gradually feed in (narrate) more thoughts or suggestions such as the following:

Invite them to introduce dramatic elements that make a particular day eventful or exceptional, such as a natural disaster. This could be a single event like an earthquake or flood/forest fire/storm, or it could be the more drawn out ongoing effects of climate change or the damage to habitat caused by humans.

Consider other kinds of dramatic events, e.g. being hunted.

As with the previous portraits of child labourers we can note that these are moving self-portraits.

STAGE 2 – MAKING A POEM

We can consider making another version of this prose piece, in the shape of a poem. Or alternatively they could choose a different animal this time. What will be the ingredients in a poem? Let's return to that question of whether to use rhyme. It is completely up to each writer. Sometimes rhymes slip naturally into place and the writer continues in that style. But often the poet chooses not to force a rhyme, although some words will always accidentally bounce off one another. Usually we can ask ourselves after we've written something, did making it rhyme suit the poem and its content? Did it enhance the content or take away from it, even diminish its impact?

There is no reason why a particular animal's voice would rhyme, but we can certainly look at *rhythm*: is there anything distinctive about this animal's movement and lifestyle that might suggest or inspire rhythm in the poem?

Compare the rhythmic movements of a tortoise, horse, jellyfish, sloth, squirrel, goldfish, cheetah, sparrow or eagle. Can their movement translate into the way the lines flow? For example, line-length: long flowing lines (whale), or short staccato lines and phrases (squirrel), or a mix of flowing lines with sudden darts and change in rhythm (shoals of fish/flight of starlings). End-stopped lines or run on lines (enjambment) will affect the overall flow and rhythm, especially when read aloud.

Long words versus short words?

Try using made up words or even combinations of 'human' words and sounds made by the animal. You can go further by mixing these in combinations of composite words that are a bit of both. Try being really inventive! 'Shnuffle-ruffle I go through the shuffly grass' or 'Plop, flop, on the pond. Glop glop...'

Consider the look of the poem on the page, e.g. for a fish, the words 'swimming around'. Remember our work on concrete poems in the previous lesson on the voice. You might also find it useful to refer back to the *Barcodes* poem about zebras and lions for the use of metaphor.

METAPHORS

Again, depending on the age group and their prior experience with metaphor, you might wait until they've started on their poems before introducing it as a consideration. But it does offer another potential layer of meaning for the poem. You might also at some point make them aware of how an original metaphor over time becomes normalised and part of common speech so we don't even think of it as a metaphor anymore, e.g. 'we're skating/walking on thin ice.' It can even become a cliché. But even a well-worn metaphor can be reinvented and find new relevance and meaning, e.g. the one we are referring to here, for climate change!

Read them this poem 'Cowtalk' by the London-based poet John Agard, who is originally from Guyana. Enjoy how his Caribbean accent affects the rhythm of the words. Here the cow becomes a very clear metaphor for something very relevant to our exploration of global issues.

Cowtalk

Take a walk to the splendid morning fields of summer
check out the cows in full gleam
of their black and white hide
and remember was a man once say I have a dream
but they shoot him down in cold blood of day
because he had a mountaintop dream
of black and white hand in hand

take a walk to the splendid morning fields of summer
check out the cows in green of meditation,
a horde of black and white harmony
maybe the cows trying to tell us something
but we the human butchers can't understand cowtalk
much less cow silence,
to interpret cow silence you must send for a poet
not a butcher or a politician

cows in their interwoven glory
of their black and white hide
have their own mysterious story,
cows in their interwoven
glory of their black and white hide
never heard of apartheid
never practise genocide
never seem to worry that the grass greener on the other side
cows calmly marry and intermarry

cows in the interwoven glory
of their black and white hide
cows in the interwoven glory
of black and white integration
can't spell integration,
cows never went to school
that's why cows so cool supercool
cows have little time for immigration rule
and above all cows never impose
their language on another nation

do yoo moo my message/do yoo moo moo
my message/moo
do yoo moo my message/do yoo moo
moo my message/moo

(from *Mangoes & Bullets*, 1990)

How has the poet linked the world of cows with the world of people?

RESPONDING TO POEMS READ ALOUD IN CLASS

After they have written and read their own poems aloud, a useful reflection is to consider reading them with a different pronoun. Try changing 'I' to 'she', 'he' or 'it' and note the effect. Discuss what is different, for the reader and the listener.

Try changing the pronoun all through the poem to 'you'. What effect does this have? Does it create a distance between the poet and the subject (animal) or paradoxically does it suggest an intimacy, as if the animal is addressing 'you' the reader and drawing you into its world? Or it might create the impression that the animal is talking to itself and we are a close-up witness: 'You roll yourself into a ball and hope the big scary thing won't notice you...'

FOLLOW-UP IDEAS

Note how the following creative challenges offer opportunities to extend learning, by reflecting from different perspectives and using different skills.

WRITING

You can use this empathy-based approach to giving a voice to another living thing that is not an animal, such as a tree. Or even take something that is not alive as such but is still home to other lives, like an ice-floe (bear)

You can make a start by simply making a rough list of the attributes/characteristics of your subject. When writing the actual poem, it can also be fun not to give away the identity of the subject in the title and to keep the reader guessing. Once the listener 'gets it', they can enjoy the way in which you bring this object to life:

'I am smooth, flat, cold and slippery. Sometimes I'm deep but other times I'm thin on top. I might crack. You can skate on me. Sometimes, when it's very cold, I'm joined up with lots of others like me so you can't tell us apart but other times, when the weather is warmer we become more like individuals – we move apart. It's lonely sometimes. But I have a friend who comes, a big creature with white fur – but she has to swim further and further to get here as the distance gets greater. Gosh, it's hot! I feel I'm shrinking more and more...'

Write a newspaper or magazine article about the animal in question and its habitat. Mix facts and information with your own opinions and also include first-hand experience you have acquired through your imaginative exploration. Include 'interviews' with the animals. This will extend writing skills in a different writing genre i.e. factual reporting.

DRAMA

Chat show interviews with animals talking about their lives and latest developments can be either serious or fun or both. You might talk like the animal in question, e.g. all chattery like a squirrel, or slow long drawn-out speech like a sloth. The chat show host or hostess can also be an animal.

ART

Draw your animal character.

LANGUAGE/DRAMA

In pairs: become two animals talking in their own animal voices, e.g. pig and dog. Just listening in, without understanding their language, what can we pick up from voice tone, facial expression, body language?

Ask them to have a disagreement, again still using their animal voices – we hear the pitch of their voices change, intensity, etc. It's like when you hear your parents in the next room – you can't hear what they're saying but you know they are having an argument. Your argument can be over a serious issue, like a disagreement over food/territory or talking about which football team is the best (Donkey United!)

Now switch on the translation button – this time we get to hear in English or Irish what each pair were saying.

LESSON 3: CONNECTIVITY AND COMMUNITY (local/national/global)

Here we are going to examine our sense of communality and responsibility to others and to our environment.

Again as a *stimulus* we'll start with a poem, 'Who Killed Cock Robin' (traditional):

Who killed Cock Robin?
I, said the Sparrow,
with my bow and arrow,
I killed Cock Robin.

Who saw him die?
I, said the Fly,
with my little eye,
I saw him die.

Who caught his blood?
I, said the Fish,
with my little dish,
I caught his blood.

Who'll make the shroud?
I, said the Beetle,
with my thread and needle,
I'll make the shroud.

Who'll dig his grave?
I, said the Owl,
with my little trowel,
I'll dig his grave.

Who'll be the parson?
I, said the Rook,
with my little book,
I'll be the parson.

Who'll be the clerk?
I, said the Lark,

if it's not in the dark,
I'll be the clerk.
Who'll carry the link?
I, said the Linnet,
I'll fetch it in a minute,
I'll carry the link.

Who'll be chief mourner?
I, said the Dove,
I mourn for my love,
I'll be chief mourner.

Who'll carry the coffin?
I, said the Kite,
if it's not through the night,
I'll carry the coffin.

Who'll bear the pall?
We, said the Wren,
both the cock and the hen,
We'll bear the pall.

Who'll sing a psalm?
I, said the Thrush,
as she sat on a bush,
I'll sing a psalm.

Who'll toll the bell?
I said the Bull,
because I can pull,
I'll toll the bell.

All the birds of the air
fell a-sighing and a-sobbing,
when they heard the bell toll
for poor Cock Robin.

Discuss with the class the attitude of the community and the sense of solidarity in the poem. Even though Sparrow confesses to the crime in the opening verse, others still want to bear witness, or offer help. This attitude is based on the recognition that we're all linked and interdependent.

Link this interconnection and sense of responsibility (or lack of it) with a

development issue, such as Child Labour, which we looked at in Lesson 1. Focus on a carpet or article of clothing made by cheap or child labour. Refer to the Rana Plaza building collapse in Bangladesh on April 24th 2013. This building that housed many sweatshops was condemned as being in immediate danger of collapse by an engineering inspector. Despite that information, the owner of the building ordered the workers to enter or else lose their jobs. (We have seen before when looking at people who live in poverty, who have no 'voice' how they would have had little choice.) Sure enough the building collapsed and hundreds were killed and injured. Ask the class to describe the actions of the landlord. Yes, we can condemn the selfish, irresponsible, greedy and criminal action of this person and yet we must ask ourselves if we too were complicit in pressurising the boss to deliver orders fast and at cheap prices? Firms such as Penneys and Benetton were ordering their goods from there. In seeking cheap and quickly available stuff from shops, do we also contribute to the problem? Or can we genuinely wipe our hands and say nothing to do with me?

You can leave this for a later moment but in response to comments such as, 'I don't shop in Penneys', or 'It's not my problem, I never hurt anybody', I have often had to give a crash course in how we are more than individuals, and how we are represented by our country, and are therefore responsible for trading practices taken by our government on our behalf. This leads into a history lesson in colonialism and how rich, powerful countries are still able to bully less powerful nations through trade deals, and long-term debt legacies that suit the more powerful, often backed up by military might. The top 85 richest individuals have more wealth than the bottom 3.5 billion. The top 1% control half the world's wealth. Things are clearly unequal and askew. When we observe that the most powerful countries who dictate economic trade (G8) are also the leading arms manufacturers, it adds up to the reality that the world is not a level playing field. And even if you can say about something, like litter dropped in the school playground, 'nothing to do with me, I didn't do it' – does that mean you just walk by and not pick it up?

So we are looking at communal responsibility and accountability.

Here is a song written by Bob Dylan, called, 'Who Killed Davey Moore?' that is a response to the previous poem and which offers an opposite perspective.

Who Killed Davy Moore

(chorus) Who killed Davey Moore
Why and what's the reason for?

"Not I," says the referee
"Don't point your finger at me
I could've stopped it in the eighth
And maybe kept him from his fate
But the crowd would've booed, I'm sure
At not getting their money's worth
It's too bad he had to go
But there was a pressure on me too, you know

It wasn't me that made him fall
No, you can't blame me at all"

"Not us," says the angry crowd
Whose screams filled the arena loud
"It's too bad he died that night
But we just like to see a fight
We didn't mean for him to meet his death
We just meant to see some sweat
There is nothing wrong in that
It wasn't us that made him fall
No, you can't blame us at all"

"Not me," says his manager
Puffing on a big cigar
"It's hard to say, it's hard to tell
I always thought that he was well
It's too bad for his wife an' kids he's dead
But if he was sick, he should've said
It wasn't me that made him fall
No, you can't blame me at all"

"Not me," says the gambling man
With his ticket stub still in his hand
"It wasn't me that knocked him down
My hands never touched him none
I didn't commit no ugly sin
Anyway, I put money on him to win
It wasn't me that made him fall
No, you can't blame me at all"

"Not me," says the boxing writer
Pounding print on his old typewriter
Saying, "Boxing is not to blame
There's just as much danger in a football game"
Saying, "Fist fighting is here to stay
It's just the old American way
It wasn't me that made him fall
No, you can't blame me at all"

"Not me," says the man whose fists
Laid him low in a cloud of mist
Who came here from Cuba's door
Where boxing is not allowed no more
"I hit him, yes, it's true
But that's what I am paid to do

Don't say 'murder,' don't say 'kill'
It was destiny, it was God's will"

Who killed Davey Moore
Why and what's the reason for?

Discuss the attitude of this 'community', compared with the community of 'Who Killed Cock Robin?' There's a clear divide between opposite attitudes in the two pieces: either it's no-one's problem or everybody's. What is the tone of Bob Dylan's song? Discuss irony and satire.

WHOLE CLASS WRITING CHALLENGE: 'WHO WILL GIVE THE WORLD SOME HOPE?'

The idea here is that everyone contributes at least one verse to one big whole-class song/poem. Some children may write one or two verses, others might write more.

Based on the two poems/songs we have looked at, they can either write verses that are based on the 'Cock Robin' response, i.e. that are affirmative and positive – 'Me, said the teacher...'

Or alternatively, the 'not me' attitude expressed in 'Who Killed Davy Moore'.

We can also take each poem stylistically as a blueprint: short four-line verses as in Cock Robin or longer verses, as in Davy Moore.

NB It doesn't matter if some pupils write short verses and others write longer ones – when read aloud going around the class, it all becomes one continual flow in one big poem/song. Everyone can make a contribution!

AN EXPLORATION OF RHYMING OPTIONS

Both examples we have looked at are songs, so rhyme is integral. In Cock Robin the second and third lines rhyme; sometimes all four lines rhyme, (the fly and lark verses). I suggest you keep this fairly free and open and allow similar variation. The main thing is there has to be *at least two lines that rhyme* in each four lines and to try to make the rhythm as consistent as possible through the verses. This can be achieved by making the lines contain a similar number of beats. This becomes clearer when said aloud – sometimes a short line on the page has the same number of beats as a long line, due to the number of syllables or the scan of the line. To help them understand this, get the class to say aloud 1-2-3-4 (four beats) and then say aloud '1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and' (8 syllables but still only four beats.)

Let's look at that these famous lines of Yeats from the 'Song of Wandering Aengus':

I went out to a hazel wood
Because a fire was in my head.

There are eight syllables in each line but four beats which you hear if you say it aloud.

Try saying it aloud to the rhythm of an Irish reel - the lines come out with the beats/stresses something like this:

I went out to a hazel wood

Because a fire was in my head.

Just like a reel this has an insistent rhythm. Hear how there is an alternating hard/soft stress throughout and that the beats are spread evenly through the line. Note too how two unstressed syllables combine and so rush by quicker to fit them into this pattern ('to a ...')

Alternatively, you could set this to a slightly different rhythm – it will still have a four-beat line but the emphasis is different:

I went out to a hazel wood

Because a fire was in my head

The two lines are more consistent. Both now begin with a soft/hard pattern and because we've dropped that emphasis on the first syllable 'I' and placed it on 'went', it gives a gentler pace to the reading. The first version might suggest the speaker is pacing out into the wood, the fire in the head driving him along, while in the second version, by taking the stress off the first beat, the speaker is moving at a more leisurely pace, suggesting perhaps that despite the fire in the head, there is a need for contemplation, to slow things down, cool off.

Let's return to our whole class poem/song: 'Who Will Give the World some Hope?' We can try making up a sample verse:

Me, said the teacher

I'd like to feature,

I'll put down my chalk

And walk the talk...

We are having fun here! Or:

Me said the teacher

Writing on the board

If I didn't take part

I'd just be bored...

See how easy it is! Note how there is only half the rhyme in the second example, on alternate lines, but still the same rhythm.

Point out that we can ask for a response from anyone in the wider community, in any

job or position: everyone can have a view, positive or negative. Start with those who we might go to first for a response, political and moral leaders, e.g. politician, teacher, priest, doctor, president.

Next, those in other positions of status, power or responsibility: manager, boss, owner, leader.

But we can really ask anyone to contribute a verse: traffic warden, lollypop lady, disc jockey, clown, dustman, busker, beggar, child, etc.

Following on from our previous lesson (2) on animal voices, we can give our fellow species a voice here too: let's hear what the lions, polar bears, sheep, whales think. 'Me said the sheep, it makes me weep...' or 'Me said the sheep, I'm one of the crowd, it makes me weep, I'll bleat it out loud!'

And why stop there? Let's give the rest of our planet a voice: 'Me said the tree...' Give a verse or voice to a flower, rock, the sea, wind, sand, Sun.

Not me?

Perhaps in a 'not me' verse, we could have, 'Not me, said the gun, I'm just having fun...'

Or to push this, we could try giving the gun a positive, more responsible voice: 'Me said the AKA, I'd like to find a better way...'

DIFFICULTY FINDING A RHYME?

Sometimes we can find it hard to find a rhyme. Let's try giving the President a verse:

'Me, said the president,
I'd like to think it self-evident
That I would play my part –
It's so close to my heart...'

Phew! That was quite tricky. But we can make it easier for ourselves by adding another word that is more rhyme-friendly:

'Me, said the president, shaking *hands*,
I'm going to help, I've lots of plans...'

Or 'Me, said the president, preparing a speech,
I'll put out my arm, and try to reach
an agreement, with the other side,
at least I can say I tried.'

See how this time lines run on into the next, softening the rhyme a little.

READING A WHOLE CLASS POEM ALOUD

When they've finished writing, read the whole poem in one go, moving around the class in one unbroken flow. It doesn't matter if some children have written more verses than others, as long as everyone makes a contribution. Don't comment or clap after each individual contribution. It's all about hearing all the different interconnecting voices share a common focus, and how individual contributions add up to a moment of communal creativity.

They can even say the title line, 'Who Will Give the World some Hope' in unison as a chorus.

Learning about and exploring serious and important issues can also be fun. More than anything else we are finding our voice and discovering our world through language and playing with new possibilities, including our use of words.

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION THROUGH CREATIVE WRITING

LESSON PLAN - 90 MINUTES

HUNGER PAINS

Debbie Thomas

Need

1. Matchboxes and sweets (numbers depend on class size: 8/9 of matchboxes contain a sweet, 1/9 empty)
2. Meal for Tanzania - cassava, mango, ugali mealie meal (mix cornflour with water, spinach, banana, water.)

Photocopy

1. Handout 1: Look who's talking (questions only) – 1 between 2 pupils
2. Look who's talking with answers – 1 copy only for teacher
3. Handout 2: What happens when you go hungry – 1 per pupil
(See end of lesson plan for handouts)

Prepare

Before lesson, put out Tanzanian food on table.

ICE BREAKER

Quick jotting: what does food mean to you? Jot down words and ideas that come into your head, e.g. hungry, breakfast, starving, overeating, crops, energy, taste, culture, religion, etc.

Teacher writes on board.

Take 5 mins. to turn into a poem using some of the ideas (could be acrostic, could just be images).

Share the poems in class

(15 min)

DISCUSSION

What does it feel like to miss food?

Has anyone ever missed a meal? Fasted before dentist, hospital op, etc.? Ever felt really hungry? How did it feel?

WRITING

If hunger were an object...

Turn the feeling of hunger into an object. Use the senses (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste) to describe it as clearly as possible, e.g. it could be an empty bag made of grey floppy cotton, smells like stale bread, tastes of a bland porridgy nothing, there's a dry rustle when you rub the cloth, it feels soft and furry to the touch.

Students read out their descriptions (15 min)

- 1. ACTIVITY:** How many people in the world go hungry? Hand out matchboxes. Put sweets in about 8/9 of the matchboxes, and leave about 1/9 of the boxes empty (number depends on class size). (World Food Programme 2016: <https://www.wfp.org/hunger/stats>)

Who didn't get a sweet? Come to front. How do you feel? Now, if your class was the world, these people would go hungry: 1 in 9. That's 3 out of your class (if there are 27/28 pupils).

(What's world's population? Nearly 7.4 billion/7,400,000,000.

How many go hungry? Nearly 800 million people every day. 10 min

- 2. DISCUSSION:** Why are people hungry?

Listen to this.

Global food supplies have more than doubled in the past 40 years – bigger than rate of population growth. So why do 18 million people (mainly women and children) still die of starvation each year, and 1/3 of people in world are malnourished?

What causes hunger? (Get group to suggest ideas)

1. War – families flee, farmers killed, land mines, crops and livestock destroyed by enemy, transport – roads to market – cut of
2. Weather – global warming leads to drought including disease (mosquitoes), desertification, lack of water to drink and irrigation, changing weather leads to poor harvest, floods and deforestation
3. Man – over fishing, overgrazing
4. Distribution of resources: people, whether in the UK or the countries of the South, are hungry because they lack the resources (money or land) to be able to feed themselves adequately.
5. Irish Famine? Disease – potato blight, economy – potatoes exported

- 3. DISCUSSION AND DEMONSTRATION:** two types of hunger

- a. Chronic malnutrition – any ideas?

This is long-term hunger, undernourishment. It may be constant, or seasonal, e.g.

annual floods Bangladesh. Not enough food, and poor quality.

Display the diet of Mariam in Tanzania: cassava, mango, mealie meal (mix cornflour with water, spinach, banana, water.)

Mariam is undernourished. Leads to stunted growth, disease and early death. It's the most common form of hunger. It can be hidden/hard to spot, e.g. vitamin deficiency.

b. Acute – wasting and starvation in emergencies, e.g. drought, war 10 min

4. QUIZ: Look who's talking. Give out Handout 1: Look who's talking (questions only).

Teacher has Handout 2: Look who's talking (with answers).

Fit the name to the speech. There are clues in what they say.

Discuss how pupils came to their answers, e.g. rice suggests...

5. WRITING: What happens when you starve? Give out Handout 3. Read through together.

Pupils choose a stage and write a diary entry, letter or poem describing their situation, feelings, fears, etc. Turn that into how it feels. 15 min

Pupils share their work 15 min

Handout 1 Look who's talking: questions only

1. 'We had a small piece of land where we could grow rice to eat. But it was taken by a company growing fruit to sell abroad.'
2. 'Sometimes I only have enough money to buy food for the baby. Then I have nothing to eat.'
3. 'My husband lost his job. There's not much food now. It's two weeks since we had meat.'
4. 'I was driven from my land by fighting. My house, my sugar cane and my orange trees were all burnt.'
5. 'I did not have breakfast this morning. The shops are full of food, but I have no money to buy anything.'
6. 'We grow a little coffee to earn money for food and clothes. But we are paid very little for it and so we cannot buy much.'

Who is saying what?

John, Ireland

Maria, the Philippines

Silvia, Peru

Marina, Brazil

Annie, a young mother from Leeds, UK

Anthony, Kenya

Handout 2 Look who's talking: with answers for teacher

1. 'We had a small piece of land where we could grow rice to eat. But it was taken by a company growing fruit to sell abroad.'
2. 'Sometimes I only have enough money to buy food for the baby. Then I have nothing to eat.'
3. 'My husband lost his job. There's not much food now. It's two weeks since we had meat.'
4. 'I was driven from my land by fighting. My house, my sugar cane and my orange trees were all burnt.'
5. 'I did not have breakfast this morning. The shops are full of food, but I have no money to buy anything.'
6. 'We grow a little coffee to earn money for food and clothes. But we are paid very little for it and so we cannot buy much.'

Answers

1. Maria, the Philippines
2. Annie, a young mother from Leeds, UK
3. Marina, Brazil
4. Anthony, Kenya
5. John, Ireland
1. Silvia, Peru

Handout 3: What happens when you starve?

1. After we eat, our food is broken into fatty acids and glucose (sugar) to give our bodies energy.
2. About ten hours after our last meal, the body starts to break down glycogen (chains of glucose which are stored in the liver).
3. After about 1-2 days the glycogen stores are used up. Fat in the tissues and protein in the muscles begins to be broken down. This means the body is losing muscle power and will become weaker.
4. Fat and proteins continue to be broken down to feed the body, especially the brain and heart.
5. It's thought that humans can last around 30-40 days without food and about 3-6 days without water

How does starvation feel?

Days 1-2: Feel hungrier and hungrier.

Around day 3: Stop feeling hungry. There's a pain in stomach. Pressing on the stomach eases the pain.

Around day 4 onwards: Feel weaker and weaker - in stomach and the rest of the body. Feel thirsty, even if drinking.

After a week or so: It's hard to eat any food at all. Blood flows more slowly, leading to a drop in body temperature. Feet and hands, then the rest of the body, feel cold. The heart beats faster. Breathing becomes slower and shallow and irregular.

In the next couple of weeks: Fat disappears, muscles shrink and soften, eyes become sunken and glassy. Skin becomes pale grey and loose. Feet and ankles may swell.

Feel cold, dizzy, faint, confused. Can't concentrate, unable to talk. Can't sleep, hallucinations.

EDUCATION

LESSON PLAN - 90 MINUTES

Debbie Thomas

Need

1. 'Universal schoolchild' gear, e.g. rucksack, tie, cap, lunchbox
2. Cards/scrap of paper
3. Prize, e.g. pen

Photocopy

Handout Apollo from Uganda (1 per pair)

(See handout at end of lesson.)

1. BRAINSTORM AND CREATIVE WRITING RESPONSE

What does the word 'education' mean to you? Teacher writes 'education' on board and students brainstorm words and ideas. Include those that broaden its scope beyond school. *5 min*

The Latin origin of the word 'education' means to lead out. Using the brainstorm and the meaning, write a poem or paragraph on how education can 'lead out' – what from and what into – in your opinion. Write and share *10-15 min*

2. ACTIVITY

Around 57 million children of primary age don't go to school.
(2014 UN figures, see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/25935185>)

We're going to look at some reasons why.

Volunteer dresses up as 'universal school child', e.g. with cap, tie, rucksack, school book, lunch box, etc. Sits in the middle of room surrounded by 30+ blank cards/scrap of paper on floor. Other students stand round in a circle.

This is the 'universal schoolchild' – any child of school-going age around the world. As you think of any possible obstacle to his/her schooling, take a card/scrap of paper, write it down and put on the ground round the child. Get as many as possible. Some will be repeated (e.g. poverty, disability, gender, war, hunger, sickness, child labour, natural disasters, poor sanitation, too few teachers, child marriage, water shortage, too far/ too dangerous to get there, parents' lack of interest, racial or other prejudice, etc.)

When pupils have finished, sort cards into piles with same obstacles in same pile.
Arrange in a circle like a wall round the child. *15 min*

Go round the circle with pupils taking it in turns to choose an obstacle and state a way to overcome it. They pick up the pile they're explaining, thus dismantling the wall. Make the solution as specific as possible, e.g. if the obstacle is 'poverty,' think of ways to make school attendance cheap: sharing books, no uniform, finding ways of paying part of teachers' salaries in kind, such as vegetables grown in school garden.

If a student can't think of a solution, go round to the next one who can. Maybe a small prize (pen?) for the pupil who comes up with the most solutions. *10-15 min*

3. DISCUSSION AND LETTER WRITING

One of the biggest barriers to education for children is disability. 2/5 of children who miss school around the world do so because they are disabled.

(see 2014 article: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/mar/18/global-education-campaign-uganda-children-visually-impaired>)

Hand out case study of Apollo in pairs. Pupils read. *5 min*

Discussion: from the case study, what are the barriers to Apollo's education? Parents struggling to pay fees, no support at school, no doctor in nearby town, lonely and sad – maybe demotivated? *5 min*

Letter writing: in pairs one of you is Apollo, writing a letter to the (fictional) charity Ears to Hear asking for school fees. Tell them why they should fund you to go to school.

The other one of you, from Ears to Hear, writes a letter to Apollo telling him how you're going to support him (e.g. visiting, paying school fees, what sort of special support in school?) *10 min write, 10 min share*

ALTERNATIVE 3 OR, IF TIME, 4: DIALOGUE

In pairs, write a dialogue between a pupil in Ireland who hates school and wishes s/he could leave, and a person of the same age in Syria who's desperate to go back to school but can't because the building's been destroyed and teachers have fled in the war. (NB Make clear this is not a test or judgement of pupils' personal opinions about school but an imaginative exploration of why someone might or might not value school, depending on his or her experiences). *10 min write, 10 min read out*

Handout: Apollo from Uganda

(based on a real case study, names and some circumstances changed)

Nine year-old Apollo lives in a small village in Uganda and has been deaf from birth. He used to go to school with his six brothers and sisters but didn't get any special support to help him learn. Apollo had to drop out because his parents were struggling to pay the school fees for all their children.

'I live on a small plot of land with my family. We grow coffee and potatoes. We used to grow bananas but the crops got diseased, so we have less money now. Every day, in the morning, I wash my face and go to dig on the land with my father. I also help to carry water and peel vegetables for the family. In the afternoon I look after the cows and wait for my friends to come home from school. I like to play football with them and jumping and running games. Fred and Soka are my best friends; they always look out for me when there are fights with other boys. I feel sad and lonely at home without them.

I have never been able to hear. Once my mother took me to try and get medical help in a nearby town, but there was no doctor so we didn't go back.

I would love to go to school. Sometimes I go, but I'm usually sent away as I can't pay the school fees.'

BEATING POVERTY

LESSON PLAN - 90 MINUTES

Debbie Thomas

BRAINSTORM AND WRITING

What is poverty?

Pupils brainstorm definitions, word associations, types and examples of poverty, etc.

Teacher writes on board. *5 min*

From the ideas, pupils personify/ 'become' poverty in a poem: 'I am Poverty'
(or write a poem about poverty, or describe a scene of poverty, etc.) *10 min*

Pupils read out. *10 min*

WALKING DEBATE

Clear a space in centre of room. Pupils stand there together. At one end is a sign with AGREE placed on the wall. At other end is sign with DISAGREE. Teacher makes statements 1-4 below. For each statement, pupils walk to a spot on the imaginary spectrum between the AGREE and DISAGREE signs that represents their degree of agreement/disagreement, i.e. if they strongly agree, stand right under the AGREE sign; if mostly agree stand near it, and if undecided, stand at the middle point between signs. Students are picked at random to explain their position. Encourage them not to follow their friends but to decide for themselves.

Teacher explains s/he is going to read out some statements. Students will respond by walking.

Statement 1: There's not enough money in the world to go round. Agree, disagree or somewhere in between? (Helpful points: the problem is distribution, what does 'enough' mean, etc.?)

Statement 2: Natural disasters cause famines. (Natural disasters cause immediate emergencies but famine is long-term, caused by political situations, and only affects poor, vulnerable people. Food is always there for people who can pay.)

Statement 3: The more people in a country/higher the population, the more of them will be poor. (Netherlands densely populated, very few go hungry. Brazil small population, lots of hungry people.)

Statement 4: People in wealthy countries should help people in poor countries. *15 min*

DISCUSSION

Teacher prompts:

- 1) A president once said, 'If my neighbour's house burns down, the fire might spread to my own.' What does that mean in terms of one country's relationship with another, e.g. a rich country with a poor one?
- 2) How may poverty in one country affect other countries? (refugees, spread of epidemics, e.g. ebola, etc.)
- 3) How can wealthier countries help? (e.g. aid money, send doctors/ teachers, train locals, send medical supplies, etc.) *10 min*

SPEECH

(individually or in pairs)

1. You're the president of Plentistan, the richest country in the world. You're going to write a speech, explaining why the people of Plentistan should help feed people in poor countries. Address, e.g.

- a) Why rich countries should help
- b) How they should help
- a) How the whole world will benefit if food is redistributed so everyone gets enough, etc.

Start: 'People of Plentistan...' *10 min*

Pupils read out *10 min*

Imagine 60 years from now. Today the United Nations Secretary General has announced that poverty has been eliminated. No one in the world is now officially poor.

Write a letter to your grandchild, describing how, over the last sixty years, poverty was eliminated. (Pupils might have to invent their own 'UN' definition of poverty – does it refer to money, food, health, physical comfort, or happiness, etc.?)

If time, pupils read out their letters. *20 min*

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION THROUGH CREATIVE WRITING LESSON PLANS

3 WORKSHOP PLANS FOR POETRY

Seamus Cashman

PRINCIPLES OF THE PRACTICE:

1. These following 'Lesson Plans' are not 'teaching' plans but facilitation plans for running a creative writing through poetry workshop in a classroom context.
2. If these workshop are facilitated by the class teacher rather than by a practitioner of creative writing (and of poetry in particular), the ideal would be that it take place in a non-classroom space: the library, a study space, a sports hall, anywhere that is 'non-classroom'. Where this is not possible and it is delivered in the students/participants' classroom, clear *all* desks of *all* but the necessary writing notepads and biro/pencils. Nothing else is necessary.

Aim for a sense of 'Zen' space. Participants will benefit greatly from a sense of internal space, freedom to imagine, and freedom from rules generated by examination pressures, legitimate in the classroom, but not great in a creative workshop writing space.
3. The teacher delivering this workshop ought to clarify that this is not an English grammar or literature class: it is a 'creative writing through poetry workshop'. So, minimum or zero emphasis on grammar, spelling, and indeed handwriting. Otherwise, the necessary fluidity of imagination will be unnecessarily constrained. Be open and upfront about this. The more usual deliverer of workshops is a practitioner of creative writing or other art, be it in poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, drama, storytelling, the visual and sound arts, etc. and has additionally the real advantage of not being 'the teacher' and as an outsider, bringing authority of a different form.
4. Class rules on speaking, conversation or other 'interruptions' during the workshop are better relaxed even at the cost of uncertainty. A spirit of freedom, openness and 'non-regulation' generates a supportive mode of trust, and a leaning towards enthusiasm.
5. The key 'outcomes' of the workshop session are what happens during the session, and are not necessarily what might have been expected or supposed to happen. Trust is at the core. The imagination will and can do the rest, to differing levels of achievement and discovery for each participant. There should be no relative marks assigned to outcomes; no percentages. Just encouraging support for all possibilities.

-
- What's right or wrong, or bad, belong elsewhere.
6. The benefits of the sessions, curriculum-wise, will reveal themselves in a non-competitive form, and not immediately. Any sense of 'competition' involved ought ideally to be with oneself rather than with/against others. The facilitator's approach is vital here.
 7. The first principle is to allow participants to enjoy these sessions.

A WORKSHOP STRUCTURE OR SCAFFOLD

Each workshop needs a basic structure or scaffolding; this is one of many possibilities, especially for 'big' themes and topics:

1. *An opening ritual*: to invite/imply a change of space or feeling towards what is about to take place; to awaken the body as well as the imagination. I use a proverb which I quote as the group sit upright or stand with arms crossed, and optionally eyes closed to listen with focus. It takes less than a minute, and is done in silence.
The physical activity is intended to be 'out of place' or 'silly' or 'stupid' in order to both engage the body and to shift the mind into an 'other' zone, thereby opening up the imagination. The proverb used need have no connection with the theme of the workshop; it is just an activity with words in its own right. I use this with adults as well as with young people and children. My own favourite is: 'Three best to have in plenty: sunshine, wisdom, and generosity' (number 1032 in *Irish Proverbs & Sayings*, Cashman & Gaffney (1974, O'Brien Press, 2015), which invites discussion on each of the three 'qualities' identified.
Different proverbs could be used for each session, or the same one repeated. Close the session (before everyone rushes off) with the same proverb. This will help hold and settle the whole session in the mind afterwards.
2. *Outline the key aims*. The stages of completion may be indicated: sometimes useful, sometimes not.
3. *Activities: the workshop core involves*:
listening thinking IMAGINING READING listening,
writing. Writing, WRITING...
editing EDITING READING listening,
4. *Closing ritual*. It is *vital* to try not to end all in a rush as some bell rings; better to leave something undone or unfinished so the ritual of less than a minute's duration can settle participants' last moments in the workshop. The opening proverb could be repeated here.

WORKSHOP 1:

THEME: EMPATHY. TOPIC: HUNGER

AIM

The aim of this workshop is to facilitate each participant in the writing of a poem that communicates to readers their thoughts, images and feelings about the idea of 'hunger' in a short poem of perhaps eight to twelve lines (or more).

In preliminary discussion, open up the variety of meanings the word conveys, and the contexts in which we use it, which range from missing breakfast to the tragedy of famine. Allow each to choose and write the poem they decide upon for themselves. The result should be a lively variety of poems and ideas to be shared in readings at the end of the session.

RESEARCH

Initial research and information sourcing can be done online and in books to get information on the subject and to supplement their existing knowledge. Make notes in a copybook or sheet.

Give each participant a sheet with some poems on the topic of hunger and the facilitator reads these aloud to the group (who also follows this on the page so that they both hear and see these poems). Discuss responses and thoughts with the full group; and/or also by smaller groups of say four. Ask all to jot down notes of the ideas they have discussed. This is part of creating their 'research notes' for the poem.

Such notes are merely background materials and may or may not appear in the poem.

Examples of poems that relate in different ways to the idea of hunger. Three poems I have used together for this exercise are: 'Hunger' by Laurence Binyon; 'I'm Hungry' by Amy Richter, and 'A Mother in a Refugee Camp' by Chinua Achebe. (These are ideal for ages from senior classes in Primary up to adult participants.) These are available on google, and there are plenty of alternatives to be found.

MAKING THE POEM

[a] create a word bank of about ten words related in any way to 'hunger'.

[b] plan on 2 or 3 verses of 6 lines each (Why six? Well, there are 6 letters in the word Hunger!) Or, as the writer decides. Or try number of letters in your name and/or surname. Make a positive active decision, and note down why.

[c] work out the purpose (main idea, image or thought) for each verse. An image, especially a concrete one, or a metaphor related to the idea will invigorate the verse.

The First Draft

[d] Write a first complete draft, as urgently as possible. No dawdling!

Editing

[e] This first draft can now be worked on to make or shape the poem.

Think in poem lines: look at the line lengths, listen to the sounds of each line and to the rhythms in the line.

And if a rhyme turns up between some of the lines, *great*. But if not, equally *okay*! Rhymes are not essential, but they do add colour and connections.

This is the enjoyable and exciting element of *crafting*, line by line and verse by verse, to make the poem to say and be what you hope it might be. There is no right or wrong, just what you want to say written as best you can do in the short time available.

READING THE POEM

When the poem is done, write out a fair copy to see how it works.

Read it out loud if at all possible to the group, and/or swap and share with someone and discuss responses to each other's work.

Other similar themes and topics to consider could be: anger, injustice, happiness, tragedy, poverty or friendship.

WORKSHOP 2.

THEME: CHANGE TOPIC: MY CHANGING TIME

The topic 'My Changing Time' is also the specified title for the poem in this instance but do not let the group know this until later (see below).

THE PLAN

Structure the workshop as indicated in Lesson 1 above. *Method:* also similar to Lesson plan 1 above.

Suggested poems to read:

'Changing Everything' by Jane Hirshfield; 'The Changing Light' by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and 'Hope is the thing with feathers' by Emily Dickinson. These are each very different poems in content, imagery, rhythm and tone. And each wonderful to read and hear. And work very well when presented together. (Ideal for ages from senior classes in Primary and all the way to adult participants.)

Discussion:

To energise the group, introduce the following (or similar) range of topics for short group discussion/comment on change in style (clothes, hair, etc.), communications, game, school, geography, environment, history; social, wealth and poverty, etc. The possibilities are endless. Allow about fifteen minutes of conversation here.

The Poem to Write:

Only at this point give them the title of the poem they are being asked to write:

'My Changing Time'.

MAKING THE POEM

Word bank/mind map

Perhaps suggest four verses of five lines each (why? 'We have five digits on each limb!' So the poem will have this connection to the writer's body' – as perfect a reason as any.) Then, also offer the option to decide for themselves, but to note what they decide and why on their sheet of paper.) Perhaps as many lines as their age ... *Rhymes:* optional, but great if they happen. *But* allow only legitimate, meaningful rhymes; never artificial or forced ones. Unless of course unless it is intended to be a 'nonsense poem'.

Writing

[a] Do a first complete draft, as urgently as you can. No dawdling! The poem title gives a clear direction for the poem's focus. Let the participants free to write as they choose.

Editing

[b] Edit and revise, and write out a fair copy.

Reading

[c] Read aloud, share, discuss as indicated in Lesson 1 above.

WORKSHOP SESSION 2.

THEME: EMPATHY. TOPIC: AN INCIDENT

(A variation of an original lesson by
Academy of American Poets with <http://edsitement.neh.gov/>)

This workshop is based on a poem called 'Gate A-4' by Naomi Shihab Nye (the poem Text is available at: www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/gate-4)

Introduction

Imagine an airport gate where an older person who speaks Arabic has been told over the loudspeaker, in English, a language she does not fully understand, that her plane is delayed. She has a medical situation she must attend to the next day at her destination and fears she won't arrive in time. She collapses to the floor and starts crying and wailing. From this kind of tense situation, Naomi Shihab Nye creates the idea of a community where compassion, food, tradition, conversation, fun and commonality are shared.

Activities

1. Before reading this poem:

Ask group to identify some incident when they did not know or understand why something unusual and even slightly frightening happened near them.

Have a discussion to discover the emotions involved in facing such unusual situations. Imagine for instance a large glass vase of flowers falling from a high shelf onto a crowded shop floor right beside you, smashing to pieces. What range of emotions might you experience? And what did or might people around do? Or what would you do? How would you react?

2. The whole class discusses various reactions to the incident chosen.

Then in small groups of 4 to 6, each group plan a tableau – a freeze-frame image they make with their bodies that enacts some key responses to the incident, showing what happened and some of the emotions it would have generated. Take about ten to fifteen minutes to create and rehearse their tableaux.

Each group then presents their silent still drama to the rest in turn, and comments are invited on what is represented and how effective it is and why.

3. Hand out the poem to each participant. Read it aloud to the whole class.

Or perhaps *play the YouTube video* to the class so they hear the poet read her poem.
video clip of poet reading Gate-A4: https://youtu.be/9V5xyEt_RYA?list=PLB0uqVEuzoEcz_IUzeETAB7PNcat9lkaF

Ask participants to make notes of unusual words, or images that they feel are important.

5. *Class discussion* on the poem and their responses.

Does it reveal empathy, community? How? Note that compassion, food, tradition, conversation, fun and commonality are all shared in this poem.

Write a poem

Write a poem about an incident each participant recalls that they were involved in and which was about helping someone in need of support.

Making the poem: make it a story poem with description of the incident and where it happened, and of the people involved and your own role. It need not be very long, just as many lines and verses as the story needs to be fully told.

Take the participants through how each verse in Naomi Shihab Nye's poem tells her story, moving it on in each verse the next stage of the incident, and including people's conversation where necessary, and with a strong visual/descriptive element in each verse. And note at the simple but clear and strong closing line.

Read the poem

As always, invite participants to read their poem to the whole group, or among themselves in little groups of two to four.