1. Writing an auto-bio poem

Chinese Whispers is about identity – exploring one’s own identity in an increasingly multi-cultural and globalised world.

1. Here is how it begins:

First there were the dinosaurs.

From the swamps of time, a frog crawled out and mated with a curious monkey. Scientists believe they ate some magic mushrooms.

They mated and moved to a cave which they decorated with hunting prints.

They invented fire, which impressed the wolves and some of these became man's best friend.

These friendly wolves, or dogs were invited into the cave, to sit by the fire. Early dogs had pointy ears - we know this from Egyptian hieroglyphs. The twitching ears of the dogs threw strange shadows on the walls of the cave, rabbits mainly, and thus was born shadow puppetry, which would evolve to become cinema and then television.

This show is descended from the more noble oral tradition.

Time passes immemorially into history. Cause begets effect. The wheel is reinvented. Leonardo Da Vinci could draw with both hands at once, in perspective.

Then in the 20th century, 'Joss' Weedon was born. He went on to become the creator of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, a small blonde child born with special powers. Also was born, Francesca Beard, who could write backwards with her left hand and forwards with her right hand and who loved to watch Buffy, the Vampire Slayer.

This show is about what happens next.
2. We know that an autobiography is some prose written about yourself. It should be clear, therefore, what an auto-bio poem is. You are going to write a poem about yourself, and the formula below will help you form it. Have a look at this example first:

Ann
Stubborn, sensitive, curious, impatient
Never stops fighting for lost causes
Travelling, learning
Peace in silence
Challenges, strategies to keep on living
Words on post-its to show support and care
Pain, dark and grief
Peter Pan flying round Big Ben
The magic of Christmas
Cambridge
Smith

Now write your own, using this formula

Line 1 – Your first name
Line 2 – Four descriptive traits
Line 3 – Sibling of / weak points
Line 4 – Lover of (people, ideas etc)
Line 5 – Who feels…
Line 6 – Who needs …
Line 7 – Who gives….
Line 8 – Who fears…
Line 9 – Who would like to see/ to feel..
Line 10 – Who believes in …. 
Line 11 – Resident of ……
Line 12 - Your last name

3. Now you have your personal auto-bio poem you should do some research about the year in which you were born. Try to collect pictures of that year – these might be personal pictures or they might be pictures of the great events of that year (apart from the great event of your birth, of course!). Also collect material about people or events that have personally influenced you in your life. If possible make a slide show of these pictures and show them to the class while you read your poem! Without too much effort you’ve become a performance poet!
2. Performance and Writing as Reflection

Francesca Beard’s Chinese Whispers shows how a performance, the script for a play/drama or indeed, any writing, can be a way in which a person can engage in reflective thinking.

Just as in Chinese Whispers where Francesca uses an ordinary, everyday situation such as shopping in a supermarket as an opportunity to remember, reflect and express her thoughts and ideas in a creative manner, so the text below was created by a student who took another very ordinary situation, waiting for the bus in a bus station, as an opportunity for reflective writing which uses the situation she recalls to develop a reflective text.

Activity:
Read the text below, answer the questions.

**Bus station**

I'm sitting in a bus station waiting for my ride home.

What's the number of the bus? 24, is it? I don't even know. It's the one that leads me home, everyday, when the streets go empty and the moon kills the sun. That's enough for me.

How I wish I was already there. Gosh, it's so exhausting going home so late in the evening.

Twenty minutes. Everything in this damn city takes twenty minutes.

My waiting will also take twenty minutes if I'm lucky. Sometimes accidents happen and it goes up to half an hour or more.

I feel I could write a whole book about this "twenty minutes" everyday waiting in the bus station. I've developed my observation skills here. I can tell when the lady in the washed out red car has had a really bad day at work by the way she supports her head with her left hand pressing the elbow against the window. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays she's the one who gets the kids after school. Two boys and a girl, at exactly 8 o'clock in the traffic jam at the end of the street. At Tuesdays and Thursdays she comes alone and passes by me between 7.55 and 8.05. One day in two years she didn't. The day after I could tell she was still recovering- too white. She had obviously been sick.

Yes, I should be a writer. I'm sick of making coffee behind the counter. I would make a good writer. Why don't I try? People don't often try. I guess it's quite amazing to have dreams but the idea of realizing them scares the hell out of them. It scares me for sure: too many risks to take. "Full time café waiter turns famous writer"- hum, sounds good. It would give a good article attached to the "impossible is nothing" one. Maybe I could even be interviewed to a cheap magazine. They would even find about my origins and trace my road through life, how I started off and where I got to.

This is option one. Then we have option two: no newspapers, no magazines, no roads traced, no merit or unpredictable success stories. In option two we have the total failure of the "irresponsible attitude" as everyone I know would think of it, would even say it, to each other kind of in secret which hurts even more than putting it up on a placard. And 'bye 'bye job, 'bye 'bye money to pay for the tickets for this stupid bus that only comes every twenty minutes if I'm lucky; 'bye 'bye face to go out and smile to
people saying: “Hello! Oh, yes it’s me. The waiter who thought she could turn a writer and now has nothing. What an inspiring experience!”

Yes, interesting, option two…

I think I’ll stick to the alternative one for today. That one that the world is so full of: (I can’t even get how can there be any alternative options still left, by the way) Do nothing. Isn’t it so much better? Provides you with a stable life full of commodity. No one will criticize your attitudes (trying to destroy your life, from their point of view) for sure. It’s so much better.

Great. Just stick to the routine and talk about your dreams, as you would never consider to realize them. Anyway, I always liked routines. I love them. My bus loves it too. Here it comes..

…nineteen.. twenty minutes. Everything in this city takes twenty minutes. Everything, unless its about making dreams come true. That one takes a whole life. If you’re lucky. Most of the time, a whole life is not enough.

Monica Antunes

Questions:

1. Where does the writer wish to travel to and is she sure which bus she is waiting for?

2. How long does the writer have to wait and why might you think that the writer finds the wait both frustrating and fruitful?

3. What is the writer’s actual job and what does she fantasise about being?

4. What adjective does the writer use to describe the attitude in option 2 and what would be the consequences of this approach?

5. What would the ‘alternative attitude for today’ provide for the writer?

6. Which attitude or option would you advise the writer/waitress to take?

7. The writer says that she loves routines? Is this true and what mood or tone do you think the writer is using when she says this?

8. Find a metaphor (non-literal description) that the writer uses near the beginning of the text.

9. Do you like the writer’s use of questions and ‘options’ and what effect do you think that this literary device has on the reader?

10. Think of a similar ordinary everyday situation that you would like to write about and develop your own text. You may wish to begin with a plan and then develop the ideas and phrases more fully. You may prefer to write a poem than free prose; the objective is to produce a piece of reflective writing based upon a very ordinary, everyday situation.
3. In the queue at Tesco’s

Early in the performance of ‘Chinese Whispers’ we are taken into Tesco’s supermarket in Ladbrooke Grove, London.

Tesco’s is the largest supermarket chain in the UK with over 1,200 stores.

1. Listen to the description of what happened at the queue in Tesco’s and identify the characters mentioned from the drawings on the next page. There are two that aren’t mentioned.

2. Listen again if you need to, and draw a line linking any of the characters who supported each other or who offered solidarity. Put a circle around those characters who isolate themselves. Don’t draw anything for those whose action is uncertain.
Chinese Whispers

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3. By now you should have a clear idea of who did what in Tesco’s. What you need to do now is to work in small groups and decide why each person did what they did. You can start the conversation by deciding who was motivated by which feeling or emotion from the box below (don’t worry if you don’t use all of them). You can check what is said by referring to the script below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>embarrassment</th>
<th>outrage</th>
<th>shock</th>
<th>fear</th>
<th>aggression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

I'm examining some vegetarian sushi
when a fight breaks out in aisle 2.
'Scuse me! Hello!'
A man has queue-jumped.
Perhaps an accident.
Zigzagged trolleys, jostling for position, could happen
Still, he can't be allowed,
not when there's so much feistiness around.
If he were sensible he'd retreat
but he stands his stolen ground.

'Get back in your own line'
shouts a matron in a sari.
The man retorts
'Get back to your own country'.
Oooh, that was the wrong thing to say.
The Philippine cashier squeaks in dismay.
And the security guard with the tribal scars
pushes past Japanese art students to her rescue
and the Australian chef from the Brazilian restaurant says
4. Now look at the section that precedes the altercation in the queue. In it we consider what is on offer in the food section of Tesco’s (and almost any other major supermarket). In your groups, draw parallels with the queue scene and what is to be found on the shelves.

Inside, the air hums with choice.

If you are what you eat,
I 'm a rubix cube of biochemistry,
consumer of international scandal,
global cuckoo, diverting food
from other people's mouths to my sleek fridge.

But we buy free range eggs and fair trade coffee.
It's too easy to feel guilty.
I have a responsibility to this economy
to spend money on stuff.
And it's tough making decisions.
What do I want?

'Pick me, pick me,' shine the New Zealand fun-size Fuji
and the Danish bacon shines fatly
and the South African Merlot winks ruby
and the French brie shrugs, 'If you want.'
5. Finally listen again to Francesca performing the poem and see how she uses what she experiences in Tesco’s to examine her own roots and culture. Explain the significance of the air plant, the yogurt and the cheese. What do you think she finds when she walks out of Tesco’s and into Portobello market?

They sell all-sorts and there's an air plant, priced £2.99, an unprepossessing weed, all wisps and drooping suspirance. The tag says it gets its nutrients from air. It's rooted nowhere. So... what's the point of that? if it can't be planted, is it even a plant? No, it's a misfit or wouldn't it be in the flower section with the heritage roses and the jade palace jasmine instead of sat here between the bath salts and I love Mum mugs?

and now I'm identifying with this weirdoid freak, If I was a plant, I'd be one of these, sucking colour from anything it can. In Britain today, it's all about your roots, your identity, but there's banana bio yoghurts over there who've got more live culture than me, I've got to get out of this place, I'm having a negative epiphany in the dairy section of Tesco's, double disgrace to my race – a crisis of chineseness surrounded by cheese. I dump my empty basket and exit onto Portobello market Straight into a walking Benetton ad.

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**Find box:**

Find a reference to:

The UK’s multi-cultural driven society

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**Explain box:**

What is:

drooping suspirance

weirdoid freak

negative epiphany?
4. Schrödinger's Cat

Schrödinger was a physicist whose famous thought experiment, ‘Schrödinger's cat’ was used to show the strange characteristics of the theory of the Quantum Mechanics theory proposed in ‘The Copenhagen Interpretation’ - an interpretation of quantum mechanics made by Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg while collaborating in Copenhagen in 1927. When Bohr and Heisenberg extended the probabilistic interpretation of the ‘wave function’, this had implications not only for the scientific understanding about our physical universe, but also for the understanding of human consciousness:

I often find myself watching the learning zone.
In quantum mechanics, it takes someone to see something for something to happen. (Chinese Whispers)

In all other scientific theories, we have models of how we think things work and we make measurements to confirm and check the theories. Quantum mechanics is not like that. What we measure in experiments is not described by quantum mechanics. Instead quantum mechanics gives the probability that a given measurement can be made.

In scientific theories in general, we do not make accurate predictions, rather look for probabilities. Quantum mechanics only describes how probabilities change with time. In Copenhagen, Bohr had proposed a solution for all the events we all observe, proposing that conscious observation caused events:

In quantum mechanics, it takes a conscious observer to turn something either or, This or that, positive or negative, out of the abstract. 
It takes you to see me for this to exist. (Chinese Whispers)

Schrödinger asks us to imagine that a cat is placed in a sealed box together with a capsule of poison gas. The capsule is set up so that it will send out the poison gas if an electron fired from an electron gun hits the top half of a sensitive detector screen, however not if it hits the lower half.

It is important to accept that the ‘waves’ involved in the functioning of this system mean that when the gun is fired, there is an equal chance of either the top or the bottom half
of the detector screen being hit. It is only when this wave function collapses that the screen will be hit.

The big question for the theory and of course, for the fate of the cat inside the sealed box, is when will something happen? But Quantum theory does not give the answer to that question. It only tells us that at some point, things will become definite, not when that will take place.

We can imagine looking into the box, the box or making a measurement to get some definite result and not just a probability. But quantum mechanics never models these events. If we do not look, there are no events, only probabilities.

However, we can imagine looking in the box and then that imagined event can be argued to be a conscious event that will make a change happen. So, the cat is neither dead nor alive until the conscious observer looks inside the box:

I've written a song about Schrödinger's cat.
It's a famous experiment in quantum mechanics –
Hypothetical kitten in a box with a vial of poison.
Simultaneously alive and dead until you check.
Would you like to look inside?
Either or, it's all the same whether I live or die miao
(Chinese Whispers)

In the quantum mechanical model nothing ever happens! The probability just keeps getting closer and closer. There is nothing to force a real event to happen unless the observer decides, which is when we meet another problem: the observer must interpret what they observe, so it could be either death or life for Schrödinger’s cat. This is
They’re both right there, simultaneously
but only one side of the coin can we see
Heads or tails, dead or live
day or night, left or right,
Quantum mechanics is a Persian carpet
with a cat black and white and a baby on it,
Which one really loves the rabbit… duck?  (Chinese Whispers)

Now listen to this section of the poem as read by Francesca Beard.