

Teaching Materials from the Literature Department of the British Council



Creative Ways

Starting to Teach Creative Writing in
The English Language Classroom



CREATIVE WAYS

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This teaching pack is based on materials developed by the British Council in co-operation with the BBC World Service. Creative Ways, a series of six radio programmes, was inspired by the British Council's 15th Oxford Conference on Teaching Literature Overseas held in 2000. The theme of the conference was 'From Critical Reading to Creative Writing' and some of the key ideas that emerged were developed by the programme series. Creative Ways also incorporated interviews with the academics and writers involved as well as many of the conference participants. Although the main focus of the conference was on teaching literature in an EFL or ESL context, we believe the approaches can be used and adapted by all teachers.

The six programmes were broadcast round the world in 2000 and 2001. Each one suggested a different approach to using creative writing in the classroom, as follows:

Programme 1
Weaving Texts

Programme 2
Images

Programme 3
Stories and Effects

Programme 4
Characters

Programme 5
(Re)Construction

Programme 6
Experience and Observation

Following on from the broadcasts the British Council and the BBC developed a website (at the time of going to press there was no permanent address for this site. If you cannot find it, please contact us for advice). On this site you can find tips and exercises on how to start writing creatively.

In this pack you will find a tape of the original programmes, and the teaching notes written by Franz Andres Morrissey, University of Berne, Switzerland. Franz is a writer and a teacher of creative writing. He was a participant at the 15th Oxford Conference.

You can make further copies of any of the materials included so long as they are not sold for profit.

Other packs in the series are: Novel Ways (*on teaching contemporary fiction*) and Classic Ways (*on new approaches to canonical texts*), based on the 14th and 16th Oxford Conference, respectively.

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INTRODUCTION

This teaching pack is the spin-off from the 15th British Council Oxford Conference ‘Creative Ways: from Critical Reading to Creative Writing’ (April 2000). It is based on the six BBC World Service broadcasts ‘Creative Ways’ in two senses: firstly, it takes up the methodological issues raised in these broadcasts; and, secondly, the activities presented in this teaching pack illustrate the literary texts highlighted in the programmes and develop an understanding of the techniques that underlie them. To put it in somewhat less abstract terms: if a broadcast focuses on imagery, the activities presented explore ways in which a writer may construct and use images in her or his writing. The idea is that a teacher can use these materials for classroom activities; or individuals can work through them independently.

The six sections focus in turn on:

- The metaphor of weaving in the writing of a text
- The use of images in terms of similes and metaphors
- Working with beginnings and endings (and their effects) on narrative texts
- Characterisation and ways in which this can be explored
- The construction of a text and how it can be de- and re-constructed
- The use of personal experience both as a source and an approach to writing and reading.

Each section is introduced by one or two ‘Warm-ups’, in which the topic of the section is explored primarily as an oral activity, usually in a rather experimental and possibly

playful manner. The rationale behind this approach is that it presents a way into the topic which puts into perspective what some students (and teachers) may see as a daunting task: to get into certain aspects of a literary text and to try to write something along similar lines oneself. As most of us find speaking easier than writing and as playful approaches to a potentially difficult concept tend to make it appear less overwhelming, the warm-ups will demonstrate to students that they are capable of dealing with both the activities that follow and the literary concepts that these activities illustrate.

The ‘Warm-up’ is followed by a set of activities under the heading ‘Working with the Broadcast’. Here you will find a number of questions about the broadcast which can be used as simple comprehension questions, and also as a starting point for discussion. However, this part can be dealt with only briefly or indeed not at all if there is no time or if technical resources to play the episodes are lacking. Then there are some activities that either directly reflect what the teachers and writers presented at the Conference or on the programme, or activities that make use of the issues they raised.

The sections are rounded off with a set of activities presented under ‘Developing the Skills’. Here, as the heading suggests, the ideas and text presented are developed further or in different directions. These can be used either to provide a more detailed understanding of the topic presented in the section or as a starting point for some original writing on the part of the students.

A word about the presentation of the activities: all of them are introduced by an overview of their objective, what kind of classroom organisation would make sense, what materials are needed and what points we might want to consider when working with them. In many cases there are titles or references to literary texts that can be looked at in connection with a particular activity. (For copyright reasons it has not been possible to include all the texts mentioned but a somewhat eclectic bibliography has been supplied). The instructions have been worded in such a way as to give the teachers guidelines as how to set up the activities; they are not meant to be handed out to students as can be seen in the wording of the tasks (third person plural rather than direct instructions). In my experience the classes work more effectively if the teacher supplies the instructions orally, not least because this allows her or him to adapt them to a variety of parameters (language competence, time available for the activity, availability of examples, cultural sensitivities, etc.). Furthermore, it is not necessary to cover all the activities, nor do they have to be dealt with in the order they are given. The choice is up to the individual teacher.

A look at the activities and the examples suggested, as well as a casual perusal of the bibliography at the end, will probably suggest a predominance of poetry in this teaching pack. Creative writing should not be limited to poetry (and the teaching pack does point out alternative literary forms wherever possible). Nevertheless, there are several practical reasons why poetry is suitable for this collection of activities. Poems are naturally shorter than any other form of literary text and can therefore usually be studied within a period or a double period. In the same way, writing a poem, at least as a

first draft, is a possible goal within the limited time frame of a teaching session. And finally, presenting the students' efforts and discussing them in plenum or in groups is usually much less complicated to set up if the texts in question are reasonably short, which again speaks for focussing on poems. It is, of course, true to say that a short story is a concise literary form, but the time available in class or during a course will normally permit perhaps the plotting and writing of a few paragraphs while presentation and discussion of submitted short stories tend to require quite a lot of time, especially with classes in which there are a sizeable number of writers. Let us also not forget that a considerable number of teachers and students are not entirely at ease with poetry, and that approaching it through such a collection of activities may result in a more relaxed attitude towards this literary genre.

One issue remains to be considered, i.e. what is to come first: the reading or the writing. The title of the conference clearly suggests that we read before we write. However, the approach in this teaching pack is somewhat more flexible. It is perfectly possible to do an activity before the text connected with it is discussed. In fact, the warm-ups would perhaps best precede the reading if they are used at all. But the question remains and can perhaps only be answered by the teachers themselves and their teaching style. I am a creative writing tutor (to non-native speakers) and teach little in the way of literary appreciation, literary criticism or literary theory. Perhaps this will put into perspective why I tend to favour the writing before the reading. The main reason for my preference to writing before reading is the consideration that having looked at the masterpiece, many a student may feel rather daunted by the work studied, which may inhibit her/his written

expression. On the other hand, having tried her/his hand at a technique and then studying how the accomplished writer does the same thing may raise her/his appreciation: anybody who has ever tried to make a soufflé, even with limited success, will appreciate even more the seeming effortlessness with which a top class chef whisks up one of these deliciously fluffy creations.

To finish off, I hope you will enjoy the broadcasts, the ideas they present and the activities in this teaching pack. I have worked with them, or similar ones, for the last six

years. Feedback to the material presented here, as well as to creative writing techniques in general, shows that there is at least one benefit: students develop a view of a text which complements the mainly analytical understanding resulting from traditional literary teaching. At best, however, the hands-on approach of creative writing leads to more creative reading and a deeper appreciation of literary texts.

Franz Andres Morrissey
Berne, Switzerland, August 2001

CREATIVE WAYS ONE

Weaving Texts

Overview

This section focuses on the meaning of the word ‘text’ and the idea of weaving as a metaphor for writing.

The ‘Warm-up’ introduces the theme both physically, i.e. as a piece of fabric, and metaphorically, in the sense that two students orally try to weave a story based on the fabric that they have been given.

‘Working with the Broadcast’ considers the metaphor in connection with a Spenserian sonnet which in itself is concerned with weaving, but also with archetypal weavers, the spider and Penelope, Odysseus’s wife, who wove a garment by day which she unravelled at night to gain time for her husband to return.

‘Developing the skills’ contains a number of texts and activities that revolve around the idea of weaving a text or perhaps spinning a line. Cloth being woven consists of warp, the threads running along the loom, and weft, threads being woven at right angles to the warp. We can use the same metaphor for writing some types of poems where the idea or a formal element (rhyme, an initial letter) running through the text may be the warp and the lines we form around them are the weft.

Warm-up

WEAVING A TEXTILE STORY

Objective	To establish the idea of weaving a text
Organisation	Pair work, then groups of four
Material	One piece of fabric per pair (ideally they should come from two rather usual and dissimilar pieces of cloth)
Remarks	This is an oral activity, making use of the fact that most people are quite at ease telling stories.

- 1 Each pair gets one piece of fabric. Participants brainstorm what they find noteworthy about this piece of fabric. This could be about where the material came from or who or what it used to be next to, in other words, who was wearing it and on what occasions, or when someone would have handled it, and for what reasons.
- 2 They orally spin a story in which their piece of fabric is a central element and the concepts they have brainstormed are incorporated.
- 3 The pairs are combined with another pair. Both pairs present their piece of fabric and the main elements of their story, without too much narrative detail.
- 4 They negotiate a tale that weaves both their respective stories into one. These can be written up or told orally to the rest of the group.

Working with the broadcast

NOW LISTEN TO THE BROADCAST AND THINK ABOUT THESE QUESTIONS. THEN WORK THROUGH THE ACTIVITIES. THE TEXT OF THE BROADCAST IS INCLUDED AT THE END OF EACH CHAPTER.

Why does it make sense to combine reading of (literary) texts with trying to write them?
(*Script 11-15, 22-27, 27-31, 32-37, 146-161*).

Where does the word 'text' come from? (*Script 60-70*)

Who was Edmund Spenser? (*Script 89-92*)

Who is Penelope? (*Script 92-93*)

The Text

Sonnet 23 by *Edmund Spenser*

Penelope for her Ulysses' sake
Devised a web her woosers to deceive;
In which the work that she all day did make
The same at night she did again unweave.
Such subtle craft my Damsel doth conceive,
Th'importune suit of my desire to shun:
For all that I in many dayes do weave,
In one short hour I find by her undone.
So when I think to end that I begun,
I must begin and never bring to end:
For with one look she spills that long I spun,
And with one word my whole year's work doth rend.
Such labour like the spider's web I find,
Whose fruitless work is broken with least wind.

Activity

REWRITE THE TEXT WITH YOURSELF IN IT

“So you’re going to now do a creative response to anything in the text that you have in front of you and if possible write yourself into any of those texts – be Penelope and then see if that helps you understand the writer a little bit better.” Robyn Bolam. (*Script 123-125*)

Possible starting points

- 1 Would the story of Penelope work in a different time and place? Update or relocate the story.
- 2 Can you rewrite the sonnet in another form, for example as a haiku or a limerick?
First analyse the sequence of elements in the poem. Look at what happens in the first four lines. Is there a break between lines 8 and 9? What about the final two lines?
- 3 Adopt the voice of the poet, but instead of telling us about his mistress, make him address her directly. How would the poem change? Do the same from the mistress’s point of view.
What could a dialogue between the two of them be?
- 4 What about the poet being female and describing/addressing a male lover?
- 5 Imagine an activity that you spend a lot of time and energy on, but that by circumstances is rendered pointless.
- 6 Are there similarities between your experience of drafting and redrafting a text and weaving and unravelling a piece of fabric? (*See Script 105-109*)
- 7 Adopt the voice of the spider.

Developing the skills

FREE-ASSOCIATION PING-PONG POEM

Aims	To weave a text around a central thread of free association
Organisation	Pair work
Material	Per participant one piece of paper with a central column
Remarks	The idea of using a string of associations is based on an activity by Iowa writing tutor Julia Wendt, the concept of writing ping-pong poems is based on a warm-up exercise by Roger McGough
Example	‘Wedding’ by Alice Oswald

- 1 Each participant writes an everyday word into the column, then passes the paper to her/his partner.
- 2 Both partners write the first word that comes to mind underneath, also inside the column. This goes on either for a specific amount of time or until the partners run out of ideas.

- 3 Now each participant takes the paper with their partner's word at the top of the column and writes a sentence/line of poetry around it and passes it back.
- 4 This process continues until each word on the paper has a sentence around it.
Variation: This can also be done as an individual activity. If so, the participants should compile the columns with their associations as spontaneously as possible; knowing that this list will form the main line of association running through a poem will impair the spontaneity.

Example

Wedding by Alice Oswald

From time to time our love is like a sail
and when the sail begins to alternate
from tack to tack, it's like a swallowtail
and when the swallow flies it's like a coat;
and if the coat is yours, it has a tear
like a wide mouth and when the mouth begins
to draw the wind, it's like a trumpeter
and when the trumpet blows, it blows like millions...
and this, my love, when millions come and go
beyond the need of us, is like a trick;
and when the trick begins, it's like a toe
tip-toeing on a rope, which is like luck;
and when the luck begins, it's like a wedding
which is like love, which is like everything. ¹

¹ <http://www.webwedding.co.uk/articles/men/Speeches/poems/wedding.htm>

AN ACROSTIC IN TIME

Objectives	a) To weave a text around a pattern b) To develop an essential creative writing skill: show, don't tell
Organisation	Group work, then plenary discussion and finally individual work
Material	None
Remarks	The same approach as for acrostics (where the initial letters of every line form a word or saying) can be used for telestics (last letter of every line forms a word or saying)
Example	'A Boat beneath a Sunny Sky' by Lewis Carroll

- 1 In groups get the students to brainstorm some concepts, perhaps even sayings or proverbs that they find intriguing. If they use sayings, these should be quite short.
- 2 In plenary discussion explore ways in which this concept or saying could be illustrated or exemplified. The important point is that the actual word or words do not occur in the text, nor should its meaning be explained.
- 3 Students now write the word or saying vertically down the page, one letter at a time.
- 4 The students word their exemplification or illustration in such a way that a free metre poem results of which the letters of the saying represent the first letter in the line.

Suitable words to provide a starting point may be WRITE, POETRY, SPRING or any other season. For advanced students a short proverb in a classic language may be quite interesting too: e.g. cui bono? (= who benefits?) Here is an example:

Your answer must not come by prying force
Except that gentle urging of your mind.
So take your time, and tell me when you will.¹

Variation: Instead of an acrostic a similar technique can be applied when exploring the 'abecedarian' where the lines start with successive letters of the abc. There are also fewer thematic constraints, which may be both a strength and a weakness.

¹ This is an example taken from <http://humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/figures/acrostic.htm>, which illustrates the concept of the acrostic as well as the strategy 'show, don't tell'...

Example

A Boat beneath a Sunny Sky

by Lewis Carroll

A BOAT beneath a sunny sky,
Lingering onward dreamily
In an evening of July –

Children three that nestle near,
Eager eye and willing ear,
Pleased a simple tale to hear –

Long has faded that sunny sky:
Echoes fade and memories die:
Autumn frosts have slain July.

Still she haunts me, phantomwise,
Alice moving under skies
Never seen by waking eyes.

Children yet, the tale to hear,
Eager eye and willing ear,
Lovingly shall nestle near.

In a Wonderland they lie,
Dreaming as the days go by,
Dreaming as the summers die:

Ever drifting down the stream –
Lingering in the golden dream –
Life, what is it but a dream? ¹

¹ http://www.everypoet.com/archive/poetry/lewis_carroll

WEAVING PATTERNS

Objectives	To explore word classes in English (particularly verbs and nouns), the facets of word meanings, possibly homophones and English syntax
Organisation	Either pairs or individual work
Material	None
Remarks	This activity can be used to explore features of grammar in English in a playful manner. If the instructions seem too technical but start out with the 'Variation' to demonstrate the technique in plenum.
Examples	'The Uncertainty of the Poet' by Wendy Cope.

- 1 Students either brainstorm or are given a list of words, a fair number of which should be usable as nouns or verbs (hand, record, face, fly etc.).
- 2 They form a sentence with these content words and if possible a group of function words (prepositions, conjunctions, articles, etc.).
- 3 Get them to reshuffle the elements into new sentences that still make sense or can be made to make sense if read out aloud.
- 4 Compare the results to Wendy Cope's 'The Uncertainty of the Poet'.
- 5 Discuss the form of the poem in the light of the painting it refers to. (Surrealism)

Variation: Give students the list of words that make up Wendy Cope's poem "The Uncertainty of the Poet":¹

a, bananas, be (<i>vb</i>), fond, I, of, poet, very

Ask them to form a sentence or sentences with these elements, the shorter and simpler the better.

Then get them to reshuffle the elements through as many permutations as they can, trying to get the resulting sentences to make sense, perhaps through intonation.

Compare the results to Wendy Cope's 'The Uncertainty of the Poet'.

Discuss the form of the poem in the light of the painting it refers to. (Surrealism)

¹ I have used this approach for a few nonsense poems, in one case playing with spoonerisms on the line 'Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern are dead', in another going through a set of permutations with the pseudo-Shakesperian line 'Aye, good my lord' using the homophonic variations of 'aye, 'eye', and 'I', as well as the phrase "We apologize for this delay and any inconvenience this may cause".

Example

The Uncertainty of the Poet by *Wendy Cope*

'The Tate Gallery yesterday announced that it had paid £1 million for a Giorgio de Chirico masterpiece, the Uncertainty of the Poet. It depicts a torso and a bunch of bananas'.
(*Guardian*, 2 April 1985)

I am a poet

I am very fond of bananas

I am bananas

I am very fond of a poet

I am a poet of banana.

I am very fond

A fond poet of 'I am, I am'

Very bananas

Fond of 'Am I bananas

Am I?' – a very poet

Bananas of a poet!

Am I fond?' Am I very?

Poet bananas! I am

I am fond of a 'very'

I am of very fond bananas

Am I a poet? ¹

¹ www.anagrammy.com/poems_rg14.html

RHYME AND RHYTHM (BUT NO REASON)

Objectives	a) To work with scansion and simple rhyme b) To create a text around a repetitive pattern
Organisation	Groups of 4
Material	One copy of the poem template per student
Remarks	a) If the approach (<i>see Introduction</i>) goes from reading to writing rather than the other way around, students could be given a copy of Carroll's 'The Mad Gardener's Song' and work out the pattern beforehand. b) Rhyme for beginners can be a dangerous thing but here, nonsense is encouraged and therefore some of the obvious pitfalls (rhyme for rhyme's sake) are not really a problem. However, attention should be paid to scansion (<i>see rhythm patterns in the instructions</i>).
Example	'The Mad Gardener's Song' by Lewis Carroll.

- Complete the line 'He thought he saw...' with an object (abstract or concrete) that has one or two stressed syllables. Fold the paper along the dotted line and pass it on.
- Add a second line in an iambic tetrameter. (∨- ∨- ∨-), i.e. 'That practised on a fife', making sure the last syllable is an easy single syllable rhyme. Put the rhyming word into the corresponding boxes. Pass the folded paper on.
- Add a fourth line in an iambic tetrameter. (∨- ∨- ∨-), making sure the last syllable rhymes with line 2. Pass the folded paper on.
- Now add what "(∨- ∨- ∨-)", he said. Pass the folded paper on.
Conclude with an iambic tetrameter (∨- ∨- ∨-) rhyming with lines 2 and 4.

(1.1) He thought he saw a/the _____	complete with 1-2 stressed syllable(s)
(1.2) _____	3 stressed syllables
(1.3) He looked again and found it was _____	_____ rhyme from line 2
(1.4) _____	3 stressed syllables
(1.5) " _____", he said,	3 stressed syllables in gap
(1.6) " _____"	_____ rhyme from line 2
	3 stressed syllables _____ rhyme from line 4

The Mad Gardener's Song by *Lewis Carroll*

He thought he saw an Elephant,
That practised on a fife:
He looked again, and found it was
A letter from his wife.
'At length I realise,' he said,
'The bitterness of Life!'

He thought he saw a Buffalo
Upon the chimney-piece:
He looked again, and found it was
His Sister's Husband's Niece.
'Unless you leave this house,' he said,
'I'll send for the Police!'

He thought he saw a Rattlesnake
That questioned him in Greek:
He looked again, and found it was
The Middle of Next Week.
'The one thing I regret,' he said,
'Is that it cannot speak!'

He thought he saw a Banker's Clerk
Descending from the bus:
He looked again, and found it was
A Hippopotamus.
'If this should stay to dine,' he said,
'there won't be much for us!'

He thought he saw a Kangaroo
That worked a coffee-mill:
He looked again, and found it was
A Vegetable-Pill.
'Were I to swallow this,' he said,
'I should be very ill!'

He thought he saw a Coach-and-Four
That stood beside his bed:
He looked again, and found it was
A Bear without a Head.
'Poor thing,' he said, 'poor silly thing!
It's waiting to be fed!'

He thought he saw an Albatross
That fluttered round the lamp:
He looked again, and found it was
A Penny-Postage Stamp.
'You'd best be getting home,' he said:
'The nights are very damp!'

He thought he saw a Garden-Door
That opened with a key:
He looked again, and found it was
A Double Rule of Three:
'And all its mystery,' he said,
'Is clear as day to me!'

He thought he saw a Argument
That proved he was the Pope:
He looked again, and found it was
A Bar of Mottled Soap.
'A fact so dread,' he faintly said,
'Extinguishes all hope!' ¹

¹ <http://thinks.com/words/nonsense/gardener.htm>

THE SCRIPT: SCRIPT CREATIVE WAYS – PROGRAMME ONE

Presenter: Suzanne Taylor

Produced & written by: Kazimierz Janowski & Carmela DiClemente

BA: Julia Adamson

Recording date: 11.09.00

- Presenter** Welcome to Creative Ways – a series for teachers and learners of literature inspired by the British Council Conference on the teaching of literature held at Oxford University each year...
- 5 I'm Suzanne Taylor and in today's programme we'll be unravelling the meaning of the word 'text', that's T E X T – and finding out how an understanding of its meaning can help students to create written work of their own.
- Each year the British Council's Oxford Conference offers teachers valuable time out from the classroom – and a chance to exchange ideas and tips on classroom approaches. This year the theme was From Critical Reading to Creative Writing. We asked Hilary Jenkins – the British Council literature education manager and conference organiser to explain that...
- 10
- Hilary Jenkins** We wanted to look at the processes involved in both teaching literature and writing literature and I wanted to bring 'creative' into it because I think far too often teachers concentrate on the critical reading and they don't think so much about how to bring the creativity of their students into the classroom and of course learning literature is much more fun if you can do it in a creative way. (*Duration: 0'25"*)
- 15
- Presenter** Throughout this series we'll focus on practical ways of stimulating students' creative interaction with texts and there'll be literature teachers demonstrating ideas they use to prompt their students into putting pen to paper. We'll also hear how important the link between critical reading – (gloss) (looked at in last year's series Novel Ways) and creative writing is... It's a link that Colin Evans, who teaches the MA in Creative Writing at Cardiff University, thinks has been overlooked for some time...
- 20
- 25 **Colin Evans** It's always struck me as odd that art students always spend time drawing or painting or sculpting and they have workshops where they do these things and music students are expected to join a choir, to compose music. But literature students can come and study literature for three years and never even compose a haiku – and that seems a very odd split to me. The activity of looking at texts critically and creating your own texts ought to come together and students ought to move and that's what this conference is about really. (*Duration: 0'43"*)
- 30
- Presenter** So training your students to become better readers – that is, to identify themes, and appreciate the writer's craft – admiring the structure, language or imagery – is the first step towards better writing and this in turn leads to better understanding. The value of this approach is recognised far beyond the lecture rooms of British institutions...
- 35

40 **Jose Martins** This approach makes readers better writers and writers better readers – particularly for Jose’s students who are non-native students and will eventually be teaching in English.

Kaz Takahashi Through writing about texts – particularly poems – students get a heightened experience – more valuable than reading and analysis alone.

45 **Kavetsa Adagala** By allowing students to bring own experience to a text – makes it more memorable for them – can interact with texts they’re not ‘untouchable’.
(Duration: 1’00”)

Presenter Conference delegates, Jose Martins from Brazil, Kaz Takahashi from Japan and Kavetsa Adagala from Kenya.

50 An important message from the conference is that interaction with texts, through some kind of creative response, is the first step in unravelling their meaning. Chairing the conference were Professor Robyn Bolam of St Mary’s College, Strawberry Hill and Professor Rob Pope of Oxford Brookes University – they took up the idea of encouraging students to interact with a piece of writing quite literally. Together they’ve developed an activity that involves using a piece of cloth as a way of alerting students to the texture and feel of writing. A piece of writing, like a piece of material, is carefully

55 crafted. Characters and places and events are the strands that are woven to make a story (a similar process to weaving a piece of cloth). We’ll hear how the idea of weaving can help students begin to understand the nature of texts – which is crucial to them responding creatively in writing.

60 Now earlier I asked where the word ‘text’ came from... listen out for the answer and check your ideas as we hear now from Professor Robyn Bolam... and Professor Rob Pope.

65 **Rob Pope** We wanted a kind of weaving metaphor and we decided to realise that quite physically with Hessian sacking, which has a wonderful texture – it’s got a great smell – and also if we could get a bit of sacking with writing on we’d have a text as it were on our texture on our textile and what we did was cut up the sack and gave everyone in the room a piece of this sack and asked them to touch it, to smell it, to think about it, look at it, pull it to pieces, do whatever they want with it but to recognise it as a made thing.

70 **Robyn Bolam** Does anyone know where the word text originates?
From this story?

75 Yes but not quite – but it’s close – because if I read you the OED definition... For one thing it’s text – text – but that’s not the only way of spelling it as you might know – tixte – text with a ‘y’ or with an ‘e’ on the end. All of these are variants – so many variants – But then you look back to the root of the word and it comes from the Latin textus *material*.

80 Yes – in English it started off as the style or tissue, which is interesting – of a literary work, but it literally means that which is woven – web– texture. So the texts we are reading, the texts we are making if we write are based on this idea of weaving which is why we called the session webs and weaving but it’s a very interesting – the stem of the word is *texere* – t-e-x-e-r-e to weave. So that’s where our text comes from, weaving. And the reason this poem is interesting to me is it shows how you can explore this idea in lots of different ways. (*Duration: 2’45”*)

85 **Presenter** So a text is a piece of writing that has a particular design or pattern which is uniquely created by the author, and the best way to demonstrate the significance of the word in your classroom is to simply hand around a piece of material (such as Hessian sacking) and ask your students what link they can make between the cloth and the word.

90 **Robyn Bolam** Passing amongst you now is something from the props department... in the drama box and I’m hoping you’ll be able to just touch it – close your eyes, touch it and think of something – maybe two or three things which you can link in with the word text. Whatever you’re holding, try and think ahead, project text into your memory, too. See what comes out of the combination and we’ll come back to this in a few minutes. (*Duration: 0’30”*)

95 Jelena, Gavin etc... .
Holding this material, this texture I...

Presenter ...You’re listening to Creative Ways from the BBC World Service and today we’re looking at the practical application of a workshop idea originated at the British Council conference on teaching literature.

100 Now helping students to gain confidence to deal with even the most difficult text is crucial for the teacher. And here’s a question you can probably all answer... What kind of writing frightens students? Well, something from a bygone age might prove challenging, or work with an unfamiliar form. How about a sonnet from the 16th century? Well Robyn Bolam works with a poem penned by Edmund Spenser – a contemporary of William Shakespeare who’s probably best known as the creator of the epic work, the *Faerie Queen*.
105 Sonnets and sonnet sequences (were very popular in 16th century Britain. Spenser’s sonnet takes the myth of Penelope as its subject. Penelope is a character from Greek mythology, whose husband goes off to fight. She fills her time by weaving during the day and unpicking her work at night...

Robyn Bolam Now while some of you are still fingering the object which is going around, I’ll read you this sonnet by Edmund Spenser, it comes from a long sequence, the *Amoretti*, and it was written in 1595. This is Sonnet 23.

115 *Penelope* for her *Viesses* sake,
Deuiz’d a Web her woers to deceaue
in which the worke that she all day did make...

120 We started from this idea of woven textile and worked towards – because
obviously the whole word for a book – text – comes from that originally – and
worked towards the Spenser sonnet via this idea of Penelope’s web, which
she was continually unravelling because that’s what we feel that writing’s all
about

125 the same at night she did againe vnreaue
Such subtile craft my Damzell doth conceaue
th’importune suit of my desire to shonne
for all that I in many dayes doo weaue
in one short houre I find by her vndonne
So when I thinke to end that I begonne
I must begin and neuer bring to end
130 for with one looke she spils that long I sponne
& with one word my whole years work doth rend
Such labour like the Spyders web I fynd
whose fruitlesse worke is broken with least wynd.
(Duration: 2’35”)

135 **Presenter** Robyn Bolam now demonstrates how she would start exploiting the Spenser
sonnet itself... in the lesson she uses the sonnet which features spinning and
weaving. The next stage involves overcoming the students’ fear of the difficult
language and their fear of being asked to respond creatively, in writing, to
the sonnet... This is how she prepares and encourages her class...

140 **Robyn Bolam** So you’re going to now do a creative response to anything in the text that you
have in front of you and if possible write yourself into any of those texts –
Be Penelope and then see if that helps you understand the writer a little bit
better.
(Duration: 0’23”)

145 **First Student** *But please don’t laugh at me...
Isn’t the spider tired, weaving all day long
His web again destroyed still he goes on
I be the spider, I’d rather leave it and march on
Surely there are more wonders and splendours
150 arranged for me little bit further on
(applause)*

So you put – which spider were you thinking of then?
Spenser himself doing like that all the time
So this was Spenser the spider talking – not the persona in the poem but
155 Spenser the poet.
*Yes I’m just cutting, cutting here
Of course Spenser later won his woman but I’m just cutting here.*

160 **Second Student** *We did it from another point of view – we call it a predator in nature.
The flower protects the self with the serpent’s help and for this it is more
dangerous than the serpent itself.*
(applause)
(Duration: 1’20”)

165 **Presenter** Some budding sonneteers and their responses to Sonnet 23 by Edmund
Spenser. To end the programme we’ll leave you with a comment from Renuka
Rajaratnam – one of the conference delegates from India, who summarises
the value of using activities which help students interact...

170 **Renuka
Rajaratnam** What I found most useful about the British Council conference that I am
right now attending in Oxford is that it tells you how to happily combine
creative thinking and critical reading and the relation between the two – how
it helps one to get on our bearings on reading and writing so one important
thing is before we actually begin to analyse and read the text, the pre-text is
when you actually feel and smell, see and talk about the text after which you
enter into it and see how much life there is in it to explore and then also to
175 have a lot of space left after the text – there’s an afterlife of the text and
which is how a work survives, the text survives and the text is rewritten and
goes on for a longer time. [Now] this approach helps one to develop on the
creative processing rather on the product of the end result so the students
must be able to overcome the fear of all the difficult elements in a text and
180 come to familiar territory of language, literature and of culture that is
present within the text and this will give them the confidence to delve deeper
and to explore in a much more confident manner and there are many levels
in which they can discover amazing interpretations and amazing literary
values within the text so the rewriting the text is one thing one has to allow
185 the student to be capable of or assist and support the student to develop that
confidence to rewrite a text so that will be the first creative exercise that I
would like to encourage in my students.

190 **Student** It’s just after listening to this lecture I feel understanding a poem is not such
a difficult thing and writing a poem sometimes isn’t difficult at all you can
just do anything you like by yourselves.
(Duration: 0’18”)

CREATIVE WAYS TWO

Images

Overview

This section is concerned with imagery in writing. Imagery is the writer's way of creating a vivid impression in the reader's or listener's mind. This is not simply reduced to pictures, i.e. visual images, but also includes most other senses. Of course, we use imagery in everyday language as well: we talk of table legs or, to describe bad weather, we use idioms 'it's raining cats and dogs'. Images used by writers need to be more striking otherwise they appear clichéd.

This episode is based very largely on the workshop run by novelist, poet and creative writing teacher Mathew Francis, where the focus in many activities was clearly on writing and less so on reading. For this reason only two activities in this section are related directly to literary texts, i.e. a poem by Orcadian poet George Mackay Brown and one poem by American poet Sylvia Plath. Some of the activities here are linked to the broadcast and slightly adapted to our purposes in the 'Warm-up' as well as in 'Working with the Broadcast'.

The Warm-up contains two activities: one to get students to produce nonsensical but often surprisingly striking similes, the second to get students to use their senses in order to get a listener to appreciate something they have experienced. This second exercise is a development of an exercise taken from the broadcast.

'Working with the broadcast' develops three activities presented in this episode, firstly, one which works with the imagery in Brown's 'Hamnavoe Market', secondly, one to develop metaphors and similes based on the five senses, and lastly one that uses the riddle format in Plath's poem 'Metaphors'.

In 'Developing the Skills' we work with three activities: the first is an oral one in which the use of simile and metaphor are explored in terms of making a description vivid. The second activity is a simple exploration of simile in which we try to find various ways to make comparisons using an abstract term or an adjective. Finally, in the third activity the focus is on representing our emotions for a person using imagery and translating this into a poetic form with a repeated introductory phrase.

Warm-up

1 – WHEN I THINK OF...

'Matthew Francis is describing how to train students' descriptive writing skills by incorporating imagery. His first step is to get his students talking – and he helps students focus their discussions with an exercise he's developed. The students are asked to complete the phrase 'When I think of summer...' They do this orally but really it is the start of the writing process as students begin to compose a first description...' (*Script Presenter 79-83*)

Objective To use sensual imagery for lively and personal description

Organisation Small groups of between three and six participants

- Material** Small cards, one set per group of participant each with a sense of perception on it, i.e. 'sight', 'hearing', 'taste', 'smell', 'touch'.
- Remarks** This is an extension of the exercise presented by Matthew Francis on the BBC broadcast.
- 1 Students are asked what it is they associate with summer by completing the phrase "when I think of summer...". They present these associations briefly to the other group members.
 - 2 Now they take a card. They re-phrase the sentence "when I think of summer..." with an expression that includes or refers to the sense of perception on their card.
 - 3 **Extension/Variation:** They try to express a sensual perception in connection with the word on their card by describing the sight, taste, smell, sound, feeling using other sensual descriptions than the ones on their cards, e.g. a summery smell as a taste, a sound as a sight, etc. (*For this the cards could be reshuffled and dealt out again*).

2 – WACKY SIMILES

- Objective** To develop arbitrary, but potentially intriguing similes, which can later be used for a text the students create
- Organisation** Whole-class or fairly large group activity
- Material** Per student one card like the one supplied below, folded down the middle
- Remarks**
- a) This is a variation of the parlour game 'Consequences' and may yield equally off-the-wall material. However on balance about sixty percent of the similes generated are quite intriguing if perhaps rather surreal.
 - b) It may help to have a copy of the blank cue sheet as an OHP transparency or pinned up so the students can recall what the final simile might look like. Experience shows that this helps the students to fill in the blanks and/or complete the second part of the simile.

Cue Sheet

As _____ (<i>Adj.</i> e.g. cold)	as
_____ (<i>Adj.</i>) enough	to
a _____ (<i>Noun</i> person e.g. woman)	like
To _____ (<i>Vb</i> , e.g. run)	as if
To _____ (<i>Vb</i>) so much	it would
To _____ (<i>Vb</i>)	until
To _____ (<i>Vb</i>) as much/hard	as a
To _____ (<i>Vb</i>)	like a
a _____ (<i>Noun</i>)	is like a

- 1 Sitting in a circle, each student writes an adjective, noun, etc. as specified in the left-hand column of the cue sheet and pass the paper on.
- 2 When all the blanks have been filled in, they fold the paper along the dotted line.
- 3 They turn the paper over and complete the second part of the simile with a phrase that should ideally be somewhat unusual/surreal. Then the paper is passed on.
- 4 The groups read out the resulting similes.
- 5 Everybody keeps a list of the ones they like and could use in a poem.

Extension: Students could try to reformulate the similes so that “like” and “as” could be left out. (This would result in metaphors).

Working with the broadcast

NOW LISTEN TO THE BROADCAST AND THINK ABOUT THESE QUESTIONS. THEN WORK THROUGH THE ACTIVITIES. THE TEXT OF THE BROADCAST IS INCLUDED AT THE END OF EACH CHAPTER.

Why do we so often not experience sensually what goes on around us?

What may be the reason for becoming aware of a sensual experience? (*Script 18-23*)

What is the difference between a simile and a metaphor? (*Script 24-82*)

What is the poem ‘Hamnavoe Market’ by Orkney poet George Mackay Brown about?
(*Script 50-69*)

Do you react to the word “summer” differently from the people interviewed on the programme?
Why? (*Script 83-93*)

What do you get to know about Silvia Plath? (*Script 120-121*)

When you listen to the poem ‘Metaphors’ by Silvia Plath, what do you think it describes? What gives you a clue? Can you explain the images used once you know the answer? (*Script 121-134*)

In what way does the riddle “defamiliarise” and what is the effect? (*Script 141-144*)

How do the presenter and Eleanor Wikborg feel about this playful approach to poetry?
(*Script 147-160*)

IMAGES IN HAMNAVOE MARKET

Objective	To find original ways of describing objects To work with the poem 'Hamnavoe Market'
Organisation	To start with in teams, then in pairs
Material	Any variations of the texts of the poem
Remarks	The idea is that one set of students tries to 'decode' the images used by George Mackay Brown (Partner A1/A2), the other set tries to create images like the ones used in the poem (Partner B1/B2). This can be done in the framework of an information exchange exercise (<i>see Variation</i>).

- 1 The class is split into two groups. One group gets 'Partner A1' sheet, the other group gets a 'Partner B1' sheet.
- 2 Separately they work on their sheets in small groups.
- 3 Finally a member from the group with 'Partner A' sheets is paired with a member from the other group. They compare notes and discuss the merits of their work.

Variation: in groups of four with two sheets each, the students with a 'Partner 2A' sheet help the other two group members (using 'Partner B2' sheet). In their variation the aim is to create new images.

PARTNER A1

Find lines and phrases in the poem below, where the poet uses imagery, i.e. metaphors and similes. Try to write in everyday language what the images refer to or what they describe.

Hamnavoe Market *by George Mackay Brown*

They drove to the Market with ringing pockets

Folster found a girl

Who put lipstick wounds on his face and throat

Small and diagonal, like red doves

Johnston stood beside the barrel

All day he stood there

He woke in a ditch, his mouth full of ashes

Grieve bought a balloon and a goldfis.

He swung through the air

He fired shotguns, rolled pennies, ate sweet fog from a stick

Hedde was at the Market also

I know nothing of his activities

He is and always was a quiet man

Garson went three rounds with a Negro boxer

And received thirty shillings

Much applause, and an eye loaded with thunder

Where did they find Flett?

They found him in a brazen circle

All flame and blood, a new Salvationist

A gypsy saw in the hand of Halcro

Great strolling herds, harvests, a proud woman

He wintered in the poorhouse

They drove home from the Market under the stars

Except for Johnston

Who lay in a ditch, his mouth full of dying fires

PARTNER A2

The phrases and expressions in *italics* below are taken from a poem about a group of people going to a market or a fun fair. What do you think they mean?

They had *ringing* pockets.

A girl *put lipstick wounds* on a man's face and throat, which were small and diagonal, *like red doves*.

A man woke up in a ditch, *his mouth full of ashes*.

Another man *swung through the air* and ate *sweet fog from a stick*.

A man fought three rounds against a black boxer and got an *eye loaded with thunder*.

One man found religion and was *all flame and blood*.

A gypsy predicted great fortune to a man who *wintered in the poorhouse*.

They drove home *under the stars*, but the drunk man lay in a ditch, *his mouth full of dying fires*.

PARTNER B1

Find ways to express in a more lively way what is being said in *italics*.

They drove to the Market with *a lot of money to spend*.

Forster found a girl
Who *kissed him* on his face and throat
Small and diagonal, *red lipstick smudges*

Johnston stood beside the barre.
All day he stood there
He woke in a ditch, *with a bad hangover*

Grieve bought a balloon and a goldfish
He *had a go on the swings*
He fired shotguns, rolled pennies, ate *candy-floss*

Hedde was at the Market also
I know nothing of his activities
He is and always was a quiet man

Garson went three rounds with a Negro boxer
And received thirty shillings
Much applause, and a *black eye*

Where did they find Flett?
They found him in a brazen circle
full of concepts like hell and the final battle between good and evil,
a new Salvationist

A gypsy saw in the hand of Halcro
Great strolling herds, harvests, a proud woman
He *spent the winter* in the poorhouse

They drove home from the Market *at night*
Except for Johnston
Who lay in a ditch, *not yet hung over and with a bit of the taste
of liquor still in his mouth*

PARTNER B2

Try to complete the missing parts of the text, either with what you think needs to go in there or with information you are given by your partners.

They drove to the Market with _____.

Folster found a girl

Who _____ on his face and throat,

Small and diagonal, _____

Johnston stood beside the barrel

All day he stood there

He woke in a ditch, _____

Grieve bought a balloon and a goldfish

He _____

He fired shotguns, rolled pennies, ate _____

Heddle was at the Market also

I know nothing of his activities

He is and always was a quiet man

Garson went three rounds with a Negro boxer,

And received thirty shillings

Much applause, and _____

Where did they find Flett?

They found him in a brazen circle

_____ a new Salvationist

A gypsy saw in the hand of Halcro

Great strolling herds, harvests, a proud woman

He _____ in the poorhouse

They drove home from the Market _____

Except for Johnston

Who lay in a ditch, _____

SENSUOUS GIFTS

Matthew Francis: “First thing I get them to write is an exercise where each person imagines they are giving five presents to a person they love and five to a person they hate. The five presents to a person they love will be pleasant experiences – not things but experiences like for example the sound of a string quartet or the taste of chocolate, they’re giving them an experience for each of their senses.”

Objective	To use sensual imagery for lively and personal description
Organisation	Small groups of between three and five participants
Material	For the extension: pieces of paper and sellotape or post-it stickers
Remarks	This is an activity presented by Matthew Francis on the BBC broadcast. If the extension is included, the result may well lead to a love or hate poem.

- 1 The class is divided into groups of four to five students. In groups they brainstorm experiences they really dislike.
- 2 Then they try to connect them to the five senses. It is important that at the end of this stage there is at least one experience related to each one of the five senses.
- 3 Then they do the same with experiences they like very much or love. Again it is important that all five senses are represented.
- 4 **Extension:** the whole class brainstorm collective terms, which can be fairly everyday (e.g. a handful of, a lorry load of, tons of, etc.) or rather imaginative (e.g. a nostril full of, a breath of, a morning full of, etc). These are written on small pieces of paper and hung up all over the classroom.
- 5 Using the collective terms they find appealing and the nice experiences they write a love poem, with the nasty experiences a hate poem.

SPEAKING IN RIDDLES (METAPHORS AND SIMILES)

Objectives	a) To develop an unusual way of looking at a concept, an experience or an object b) To find different ways of describing something
Organisation	In pairs or small groups
Material	Possibly a few riddles as input (cf <i>New Exeter book of Riddles</i>)
Notes	For less ambitious writing the result of this activity may simply be a few riddles.
Examples	'Metaphors' by Silvia Plath

- 1 Think of a concept, an object that is important to you (but also to others) or an experience that would be shared by a number of people.
- 2 Now write down as many statements as you can about this, preferably in the form of comparisons. These must be truthful, but they can be surreal, silly, misleading, etc. and they must not mention what you are defining.
- 3 In small groups or pairs read out your list and check which ones your colleagues get immediately.
- 4 Try to reformulate the ones that give the game away or get rid of them.
- 5 Now write a riddle poem using the statements you've decided to keep, but avoid the use of 'like', 'as', etc.

Compare the results to Silvia Plath's poems 'Metaphors'

Metaphors by Silvia Plath

I'm a riddle in nine syllables
An elephant, a ponderous house
A melon strolling on two tendrils
O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!
This loaf's big with yeasty rising
Money's new-minted in this fat purse
I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf
I've eaten a bag of green apples
Boarded the train there's no getting off

Developing the skills

SENSUAL EXPERIENCES

Objective	To become aware of our use of imagery when we want to create a vivid description
Organisation	Small groups of between three and six participants
Material	Small cards, one per participant, each with an input word/phrase on it related to one of the five senses (e.g. 'favourite meal', 'favourite flower', 'a singer/band you really hate', 'a truly wonderful smell', 'your favourite texture/material/cloth', 'childhood experience', etc.)
Remarks	This oral activity is intended to make use of the fact that most of us try to use similes and metaphors when we try to get listeners to appreciate something we've experienced.

- 1 Participants form groups of three to four. They are given a pile of input cards and pick one.
- 2 Individually they try to work out how to get across to the other group members what is special about the item on their card.
- 3 In turn participants tells the rest of the group as vividly as possible what it is that makes them feel so strongly about the item on their card.
- 4 The rest of the group can ask questions involving the senses that the participants have not used in their description, e.g. 'if x was a smell, what would it smell like?'

Variation: with a strong group of students the presenters could be made to present their item/experience without to referring to the sense of perception primarily associated with it, e.g. your favourite texture with any description except the sense of touch.

WHAT IS IT LIKE?

Objective	To make an abstract term or an adjective tangible through unusual comparisons
Organisation	Plenary, then individual work
Material	None
Example	Parolles speech on virginity in 'All's Well that End's Well'
Notes	If students are stuck it may be helpful to suggest that they write down their sentences about the word with a predictable syntactic pattern. The simplest would be 'a silence (like)...'

- 1 Brainstorm a number of abstract nouns that are quite often used but never really described (e.g. 'silence', 'love', 'sadness', etc.) or simple adjectives (sad, cold, happy, slow, etc.) on the board or the OHP.

- 2 Pick one that you feel strongly about, for whatever reason.
- 3 Think of as many ways as you can to illustrate the concept of the word you have chosen; which situation or possible experience would describe a facet of the concept or the whole concept dramatically/clearly/graphically/poignantly.
- 4 Compile the above into a list and either see if you can bring them into one text, possibly leaving out the word for the concept altogether, or use it only in the opening or a final sentence for a short text.

‘LOVE IS...’

Objective	a) To make comparisons that are different from everyday ones b) To work consciously with or without the linking expressions ‘like’ and ‘as’
Organisation	Plenary
Material	A big piece of paper for a mindmap, possibly coloured pens;
Examples	Adrian Henri’s ‘Love is...’ or ‘Without you’ and Roger McGough’s ‘What you are’; by contrast Adrian Henri’s ‘Car Crash Blues’ (see Bibliography)
Notes	Participants are encouraged to begin each one of their descriptions with a repetition.

- 1 Imagine a person who means a lot to you, a lover, a partner, a parent, somebody who’s let you down, somebody you’re glad to see the back of.
- 2 Put this person into the centre of the piece of paper with enough space underneath to write a phrase or a line.
- 3 Make a list of the things in your relationship with that person that you find memorable. These can be experiences that nobody else would share in a similar situation.
- 4 Group these in mind map-fashion around the name.
- 5 Add to this mind map ways in which this person affects your five (or more) senses; try to find at least one example for each one of the senses.
- 6 Go through the points and mark the ones you think somebody else would have had as well. These may be excluded later.
- 7 Under the name write a phrase which could open every statement you may make on the basis of the points that you’ve got in your mind map.
- 8 Write a poem in which each line or each stanza begins with the phrase from 7.
- 9 **Extension:** Go through your poem and consider knocking out all the comparison words such as ‘like’, ‘as’, etc.

CREATIVE WAYS - PROGRAMME TWO

Presenter: Suzanne Taylor

Produced & written by: Kazimierz Janowski & Carmela DiClemente

BA: Julia Adamson

Recording date: 18.09.00

- Presenter** Welcome to Creative Ways – a series for teachers and learners of literature inspired by the British Council Conference on the teaching of literature held at Oxford University each year
- 5 Every teacher knows that there'll always be certain texts that scare students, – Hilary Jenkins, the British Council literature manager and conference organiser, decided that overcoming fear of texts should be one of the main topics under discussion in Oxford this time round...
- Hilary Jenkins** Texts are frightening, particularly literary texts because sometimes they look unusual, they don't look like other texts...unfamiliar vocab, ...feel that they're somehow special. (*Duration: 0'20"*)
- 10
- Presenter** So there are several reasons why students find literary texts alarming – but as we heard, sometimes that fear comes from feeling uncomfortable with books and poems – because they're regarded as 'somehow special'. Well today in Creative Ways we'll examine ways of making students more comfortable with literary techniques, and find out how to use these to help them overcome their fear of putting pen to paper. And leading us through will be Matthew Francis - a novelist and poet who also lectures in Creative Writing [at the University of Glamorgan]. We'll hear how he builds his students' confidence and skills at dealing with new language and forms. But first, he describes how language should be used to offer new insights into what may be familiar experiences and events...
- 15
- 20
- Matthew Francis** Most of the time we go through life with our eyes closed, our ears closed, not really experiencing things because there's so much we've got to be getting on with, so much we've got to be thinking about, we don't concentrate on the immediate experiences that we're having, on the things that are getting through to our senses. But the first time we experience something it's new, it's strange, it's exciting, it's very vivid and sometimes you can get back to that first experience. (*Duration: 0'23"*)
- 25
- Presenter** And the advice that he offers to his students is that they use imagery in their written work. Now the devices we'll hear about are simile and metaphor which writers use to compare one thing with another. Similes use the words as or like, for example, he looks like a wolf... while a metaphor describes one thing by means of another. So if you want to describe someone who's shy, you could say they're a mouse.
- 30
- 35 Here's an example of each from one of the poems that we'll hear throughout the programme. The poem's 'Hamnavoe Market' by George Mackay Brown, an author who lived in the North of Scotland on the Orkney islands. It's a poem rich in simile and metaphor.

40 Forster found a girl who put lipstick wounds on his face and throat,
 small and diagonal like red doves
 Garson went three rounds with a negro boxer
 and received thirty shillings much applause
 and an eye loaded with thunder
(Duration: 0"20")

45 **Presenter** Wonderful images there from the poem Hamnavoe Market, with lipstick
 marks described as small and diagonal like red doves – red doves captures
 perfectly the shape of those kisses, while the use of a metaphor – an eye
 loaded with thunder – is an impressively original way of describing
 50 something quite ordinary – a bruised eye. Now those are just two examples
 from Mackay Brown’s poem – it’s packed with strong and vibrant images –
 which is why it’s so good to use in the classroom. Matthew Francis explains
 further why he uses a poem rather than an a piece of prose... and why he
 uses this one in particular...

Matthew Many of the students I teach they’ve encountered very few poems and are
 55 **Francis** perhaps encountering their first ever contemporary poem... by a living writer
 and they don’t know how to take it and they feel I think... they feel under
 pressure to respond in certain ways; they think it’s a very special, a very
 exotic, very frightening form of writing and one of the things I try and do is
 make it a bit more familiar... a bit easier for them to cope with.

60 Hamnavoe Market by George Mackay Brown, the Orcadian poet, tells of a
 group of men in Orkney who go to the fair... there they encounter all sorts of
 interesting experiences. One of them gets drunk, one of them meets a girl
 and gets kissed...

65 Hamnavoe Market
 They drove to the market with ringing pockets
 Forster found a girl who put lipstick wounds on his face and throat
 small and diagonal like red doves
 Johnston stood beside the barrel, all day he stood there
 He woke in a dish, his mouth full of ashes

70 It’s all described in slightly unusual language, language that would perhaps
 take people by surprise when they first encounter it. For example candyfloss
 is described as sweet fog... eating sweet fog from a stick.

75 Grieve bought a balloon and a goldfish
 He swung through the air, he fired shotguns
 rolled pennies, ate sweet fog from a stick.
(Duration: 1'19")

Presenter There we heard a perfect example of how a familiar, ordinary experience can be transformed into the extraordinary. It's such a fantastic line how ordinary spun sugar can become extraordinary in the form of a cloud of fog. So, if the goal is for students to write in an original and interesting way... how do you achieve it?

80

Well, the first stage is not to ask your students to write, just talk. Matthew Francis explains why....

Matthew Francis The reason for that is that everybody has verbal skills that they don't know they have and so I think it's very helpful to start off with talking where they feel more confident and they're used to doing it and let them use those verbal skills which will feed into their writing. So the first thing I want them to do is use language in a more concrete way to do with the actual... the sensual experiences behind language, behind the generalisations people use.

85

90 *(Duration: 0'28")*

Presenter You're listening to Creative Ways from the BBC World Service and today we're looking at the practical application of a workshop idea originated at a recent British Council conference on teaching literature. Matthew Francis is describing how to train students' descriptive writing skills by incorporating imagery. His first step is to get his students talking – and he helps students focus their discussions with an exercise he's developed. The students are asked to complete the phrase 'When I think of summer...' They do this orally but really it is the start of the writing process as students begin to compose a first description...

95

100 **Vox Pops** When I think of summer I think of the sound of the sea and the taste of oysters
The sound of lawnmowers
The sound of seagulls

Matthew Francis So we can see straight away that everybody has a different experience underlying that simple, commonly used word 'summer' and the great fascination of this is hearing other people's individual experiences.

105

And then I point out to them if you just use the word 'summer' in your poem you're not telling people about that particular concrete sensuous experience you had and that's what I'm trying to get them to do with that exercise.

110 *(Duration: 0'32")*

Presenter As we heard, and Matthew Francis has observed, every response is unique. By emphasising what the essence of summer is for them students can begin to move away from general descriptions of the universal. This is reinforced with another task – this time the students are asked to write their responses to a prompt from Matthew Francis...

115

Matthew Francis First thing I get them to write is an exercise where each person imagines they are giving five presents to a person they love and five to a person they

120 hate. The five presents to a person they love will be pleasant experiences – not things but experiences like for example the sound of a string quartet or the taste of chocolate, they’re giving them an experience for each of their senses.

Vox Pop The sound of the sea
and the smell of petrol
the spring when you have the daffodils and the new leaves on the trees
125 the smell of espresso in the morning
chocolate

Matthew Francis Then for the person they hate they give them five unpleasant experiences and I give them 10 minutes and they write down these experiences – and then they read them out and we hear the different experiences they’ve described – all sensuous experiences, experiences of the senses.
130

Vox Pop The smell of sweating people and the taste of coffee
stale tobacco smoke
other people’s children
hot dogs and onions
135 Plymouth fish market

Matthew Francis I get them to pick one of those experiences and try to imagine they are explaining it to someone who has never actually known it before – so the taste of chocolate for example – what’s the taste of chocolate like? So I get them to use a simile – just think up a simile, write it down, and then we compare the similes people have thought of. (*Duration: 1’45”*)
140

Sting (*Duration: 0’10”*)

Presenter Now here’s a riddle for you. It’s a riddle contained in Sylvia Plath’s poem entitled Metaphors. Sylvia Plath’s best known as a novelist – the most being The Bell Jar. Now in her poem Metaphors, she offers a description of a common condition – can you guess what that condition is? Have a listen.
145

Metaphors by Sylvia Plath
I’m a riddle in nine syllables
an elephant, a ponderous house
a melon strolling on two tendrils

150 **Presenter** A melon strolling on two tendrils? ...We’ll get the answer to that riddle in a moment. Matthew Francis has very deliberately chosen to work with the Plath poem precisely because of the difficulties it presents. Let’s hear the rest of the poem, and join Matthew Francis as he reveals the solution to the riddle.

155 Oh red fruit, ivory, fine timbers
This loaf’s big with its yeasty rising
money’s new minted in this fat purse...

- Matthew Francis**
160 It's some strange ways of looking at pregnancy – it's a poem about her own pregnancy and describing it in unusual terms. I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf, I've eaten a bag of green apples boarded the train – there's no getting off.
- I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf
I've eaten a bag of green apples
boarded the train – there's no getting off
- 165 It has the effect of defamiliarising something – a familiar experience, pregnancy, that everybody knows about – but for the person that's going through that it's obviously, it's the first time they're experiencing it, and it's strange and the poem captures that by its use of metaphors. (*Duration: 0'48"*)
- Presenter**
170 So the answer to the riddle what am I? ...is – pregnant. Now that poem with its indirect yet wonderfully evocative references to pregnancy provides lots of great examples of metaphors. It's effective in the classroom too because there's a fun, game element to it – the riddle.
- Now as well as using this activity in the classroom Matthew Francis also demonstrated it at the Oxford Conference. And one of those delegates present was literature lecturer Eleanor Wikborg. She was very impressed with his session, recognising how much it can help to familiarise learners with what can be thought of as a difficult and obscure aspect of the language – the use of metaphors in creative writing. But by working with the verse form rather than an extract from a novel, students' confidence with poetry is boosted and their fear is banished.
- 175
180
- Eleanor Wikborg**
185 I think this kind of game playing approach is a terrific idea and I think that's what students need when they're approaching poetry because nearly all students feel intimidated by poetry. So if you start off by getting them to formulate their own, sensual experience then you immediately enable them they feel they can do something and then if you go onto a poem, which is what he did, then you can get them to identify the sense experiences and see that well they too can have these experiences and formulate them.
(*Duration: 0'39"*)
- Presenter**
190 Eleanor Wikborg. Now in today's programme we've looked at how metaphors can transform the everyday and mundane experience into a memorable one. By helping your students work with metaphors you'll hopefully help them to pen a few too. So, for more classroom ideas that'll help your students, join me Suzanne Taylor next time for another Creative Ways.

CREATIVE WAYS THREE

Stories and Effects

Overview

This section focuses on beginnings, endings and on meaning. How we shape a text, or how a text is shaped, will create certain ideas in the reader's mind. Examining how such effects can be achieved is an important element in the understanding of a text. However, the question of meaning is one that is a different one. In the creative writing anthology *The Practice of Poetry: Writing Exercises from Poets Who Teach* (Behn and Twichell 1992) American poet Sidney Lea describes an exercise using a diary or journal, where you choose three journal entries spaced at least four days apart, and explore their connections in a poem. He suggests that this is a good exercise to help overcome 'writer's block'. However what is interesting in this context are Lea's thoughts on the issue of Meaning.

'A poem's aim isn't to start with a conclusion and then to disguise it, so that someone smart can find the... 'hidden meaning'. [...] Many academic instructors ask, What is the poet trying to say? As if s/he had some terrible throat disease. [...] The capital-M meaning of a poem consists... exactly of the language imagination and logic that found the connections [between apparently unconnected personal experiences],' (p.18).

The same undoubtedly is true for any literary text. We should not so much focus on what the author wanted to tell us (we'll never know) or what the 'message' is (literary texts don't have one or just one) than examine how the text affects us as readers and how this effect is produced.

This is not to say that we can or should ignore meaning(s) and how this/these may be created. In the context of story telling, and this is the main focus of this section, perhaps it is useful to consider the master story teller Edgar Allen Poe, whose theory of the short story is perhaps best presented in his review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'Twice-Told Tales':

'A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents – he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tends not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design,' (*Penguin Selected writings*, p.446).

Whoever tells a story tells it for effect. The effect can be to educate (as in fable or a parable), it can be to produce goose flesh (in a horror story), to amuse (in a joke) or to create sympathies and antipathies (in romance or almost any personal account). In the Warm-up we shall explore the ways in which stories can flow and how a new storyteller may take it along a different route.

In 'Working with the Broadcast' we shall explore the issue of completing stories and the effect different endings may create. The first activity focuses on an activity presented by Beverley Naidoo at the Oxford conference, which she explains in some detail in the broadcast. This is followed by an activity that is a variation of the Warm-up, but actually compares the differences in the development of various stories.

In 'Developing the Skills' we look at ways in which we can develop a traditional or mythical tale by changing its focus or looking at it from the point of view of one of the protagonists. Then we use a similar approach to a focus on one person's plight in a much bigger picture and we wind up with a look at some dramatic scenes with a conflict between the characters and how we can develop such scenes ourselves.

Warm-up

AND THEN, WHAT HAPPENED...?

Objective To explore imagination through oral story-telling in a group and to see how different stories emerge

Organisation Small groups of around four to five participants, ideally of equal size.

Material Stereotypical beginnings printed on the same number of cards as there are groups. Such beginnings could be

- Once upon a time there lived a... who had three...
- Sleep eluded Jemma, as she lay tossing and turning in her bed...
- The more he thought of the old manuscript, the more Jonathan Smythe-Smith-Smythe was drawn into...
- etc.

Remarks Obviously the opening sentences can be made up to suit the students' background (the above examples being derived from Western European popular fiction).

- 1 The participants sit in circles in small groups. One participant in each group is given an opening sentence (these could be different ones or all the same to explore the different directions the same opening can lead to).
- 2 The participant in question starts out by spinning a story from the first sentence onwards. After about two minutes an acoustic signal is given.
- 3 The next student takes over the story where the previous one has left off and continues with the plot until the next signal passes the story-telling baton to the next student.
- 4 The last student needs to try and bring the story to a close. This could be a cliff-hanger ending ('to be continued' as in a soap opera) with suitable questions asked or it can be a proper ending ('and they lived happily ever after').
- 5 **Extension:** The students could be asked to take notes so that they can tell the story to the other groups at the end of the activity.

Working with the broadcast

NOW LISTEN TO THE BROADCAST AND THINK ABOUT THESE QUESTIONS. THEN WORK THROUGH THE ACTIVITIES. THE TEXT OF THE BROADCAST IS INCLUDED AT THE END OF EACH CHAPTER.

In what way is reading not only a passive process? In what way do we as readers contribute to the reading and find meaning in a text? (*Script 25-35*)

Why is it important to think of an ending when you start writing the beginning? (*Script 48-50*)

What is Beverley Naidoo's relationship with the text, her characters and her readers? Do you think that this is generally for writers? (*Script 61-69*)

What genre would you say is 'The Bride' by Suniti Namjoshi? (*Script 79-95*)

What are Beverley Naidoo's thoughts on the meaning of 'The Bride'? Do you agree with her view?

FINISHING THE STORY OFF

"I read the participants Suniti Namjoshi's story 'The Bride' from her *Blue Donkey Fables*. It's only a two paragraph story and I read them the first paragraph and asked them then to create the second – the idea is that they will then in pairs work out an ending and begin to explore some of the things that actually writers do." (*Beverley Naidoo, 75-78*)

Objective To develop an ending from a beginning
To work with a particular narrative genre (fairy tale)
To explore 'ideological' implications of particular endings

Organisation Pair work

Material – one copy of the two paragraphs of the story per pair on two separate sheets
– some thumbtacks or bluetack to hang up the student's work

Remark Instead of 'The Bride' most fables or stories with a folk wisdom can be used as well. The texts would have to be cut after the exposition.

Text 'The Bride' by Suniti Namjoshi

- 1 Each pair is given the first paragraph of Suniti Namjoshi's story 'The Bride'. They are asked to read it carefully.
- 2 Both partners suggest how they think the story continues and ends.
- 3 They explain to each other what they think that their ending does to the story.
- 4 They then try to agree on an ending which is written down.
- 5 The endings are either read out to the other pairs or (to save time) pinned-up around the room where they can be inspected.
- 6 The students are then given the handouts with the second part of the story. They discuss, first in pairs, then in plenum, how the various endings and the ideologies differ.

The Bride by *Suniti Namjoshi*

Once upon a time there was a proud young prince and he had reason to be proud. He was heir to the kingdom, he was handsome and healthy, he had been extremely well-educated and all the social graces that could reasonably be taught had been carefully inculcated. What was more, his father was a King and his father's father and his father before that so that his right to rule was undisputed. Now when it was time for this young man to marry he said to his father "Father you have always said that only the best was good enough for me. I have the best falcons and the best hounds and the best stallions in all the world. But where will you find a bride who is worthy of me?"

The king didn't think that this would be much of a problem. He had contests instituted throughout the kingdom. There were contests for beauty and contests for strength and contests for knowledge and intelligence and wit and there were skill testing contests for all sorts of things such as archery and music. When the tests were done the winners of the contest were presented to the Prince. He looked them over – their credentials were good, indeed he began to be afraid that their credentials were better than his. "These women have excelled," he said to his father, but they seem to be lacking in the womanly qualities." "Well of course," said his father, "I have weeded these out, you can now choose from those who did not compete."

SWAPPING STORIES

Objective	a) To plot a story with a particular goal (effect/moral/meaning) b) To develop a story from a given beginning c) To explore “ideological” implications of particular endings
Organisation	Initially individual, later pair work
Material	–
Remark	a) This takes Beverley Naidoo’s activity one step further in that it is aimed at getting the students to write their own stories and to develop them in two (perhaps rather different) directions b) To prevent writer’s block the students could be asked in advance to think of an effect that their story aims to create in the readers, either to teach them something, to demonstrate a human foible, to amuse or entertain in a specific way (horror story, romance, satire, etc.).

- 1 The students write down a very rough outline of a story.
- 2 Then they think of a first sentence that leads into the story and eventually to the effect they want the text to create. (*see Poe quotation in the Overview*)
- 3 They start writing their story until told to stop.
- 4 They exchange the part of their story already written with their partner. Then they continue writing the new story they’ve been given and bringing it to a satisfactory ending.
- 5 At home or later the students complete their own story by writing the ending to the text they passed on to their partners.
- 6 Finally they discuss the differences in their endings as well as if and how the ending supplied by the partner changes the original direction and aim of the story.

Variation

A similar activity is possible with a Poe short story, e.g. ‘The Cask of Amontillado’, ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’, ‘The mask of the Red Death’, etc.

- 1 The students are given the first paragraphs (or two) of a story they do not know and are asked to read the text very carefully for clues as to the direction the story is likely to take.
- 2 Based on the language of the paragraphs they analyse what the ‘effect’ may be that the opening suggests (*keeping in mind Poe’s views on the story writer’s craft quoted in the Overview*).
- 3 In pairs they suggest how the story could go on and end.

Developing the skills

ON OLD SONG RESUNG

Objective a) To rethink a popular story from the angle of a character
 b) To focus on an element that the popular story does not deal with in this explicit fashion

Organisation Can be done in plenary, but perhaps better in pairs

Examples ‘The Handless Maiden’ by Vicki Feaver and the Grimm/Russian fairy tale it is based on; or ‘Judith’ and the relevant passages from the Bible

Remarks a) Participants may need some suggestions for stories to use. These can come from popular folk/fairy tales or myths as presented in Ovid (or Ted Hughes) or any of the popular retellings of Greek, etc. myths.
 b) With a multicultural group the interest may be on including myths from the participants’ own culture.

- 1 Either in class or in small groups the students brainstorm folk/fairy tales or myths which ideally contain an epiphany, i.e. a moment on which the outcome of the tale focuses, e.g. the moment when Narcissus slips into the water that holds his mirror image with which he is in love. (*Dali’s painting may help here too*)
- 2 Then they try to find an aspect that is vital for this central moment/epiphany.
- 3 After having chosen a story, the students individually choose an angle (i.e. person or a moment in the story) from which to tell the incident they consider central.
- 4 They write the story from that angle, possibly using the pivotal aspect in 2 as a clinching paragraph, or if they are writing a poem, as a final line.
- 5 Then the Vicki Feaver poems ‘The Handless Maiden’ and/or ‘Judith’ (and, if you can lay your hands on them, the source texts) are read in class.
- 6 In a discussion the class tries to determine in what way the focus of the poem has shifted from the one of the fairy tale/myth, i.e. what was the prime focus of the tale/myth, and what is the prime focus of the poem. The same can be done for the texts written by the students.

A DISASTER HAPPENING TO WAIT?

Objective	a) To work out a character and trace her/his development b) To describe a momentous event without going overboard
Organisation	Individual work, possibly groups of four to five as a group activity
Material	If done as a group exercise A5 sized sheets of paper or cards, one per student
Examples	Stories in ' <i>Monkfish Moon</i> ' by Romesh Gunsekera, to an extent 'Did Anything Happen at the Field Today, Dear?' by Richard Hill
Remarks	a) This can be done as an individual activity or in a group. As a group activity each of the steps described below is done in terms b) It is best to insist on the limited focus of a disaster through either a detail in the disaster or through a minor character.

- 1 Develop a character who is comparatively unlikely to play a major or heroic role in most if not all contexts. Characterise this person in as much detail as you think are necessary.
- 2 Imagine a disaster, either natural or man-made, which will affect this person.
- 3 Describe some aspirations or hopes this person had before the disaster struck.
- 4 Now present the ways in which the disaster has thwarted this person's hopes or ambitions.
- 5 Describe briefly what the person is like as a result.
- 6 Write the notes up into a text, which could be a short story, a dramatic monologue (or dialogue), perhaps even a poem.

CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF (ANOTHER) AUTHOR

- Objectives**
- a) To explore in a pivotal scene in a play
 - b) To work out a potential development from an initial scene with a conflict
- Organisation**
- Group work, ideally four students to a group (If there are more than two characters in the scene the students work with then you may want to work with a pair to analyse the scene and the same number of students as there are characters in the scene analysed to develop the scene afresh)
- Material**
- Central scenes in plays with ideally two, perhaps three characters
- Examples**
- Christopher Hampton 'The Philanthropist' Scene One and Scene Four, Harold Pinter 'The Lover' Scene One, William Shakespeare or 'Macbeth' I.7, or scenes between Olivia and Viola or Orsino and Cesario/Viola in 'Twelfth Night'. Other possibilities are plays by Caryl Churchill (e.g. almost any scene in 'Top Girls' or 'Owners'), Tennessee Williams, etc.
- Notes**
- a) If time is short, this could be done as an oral/drama exercise
 - b) To keep the students occupied at all times, it may be to choose scenes which involve only two characters; then both students could enact both characters thus writing two scenes simultaneously.
- 1 Hand out a number of scenes to the students (see examples) and ask them to read them carefully (perhaps as preparatory homework).
 - 2 The students are split up into groups which correspond to the combined number of characters in the scenes the groups deal with (e.g. five if one scene involves three and the other scene two characters).
 - 3 In subgroups (pairs or a group of three) they describe a) the characters, b) the problem or conflict they find themselves in and c) the setting of their respective scenes (it doesn't matter too much if their understanding is a little off-beam), and put their findings down on a piece of paper.
 - 4 The notes are exchanged and each subgroup attempts to recreate a scene with the information they have been given. This can happen with students writing the part of one character each or in a drama improvisation.
 - 5 The resulting sketches of the subgroups are then compared with the original scene, and the student discuss in what way of the contents of the two versions differ.

CREATIVE WAYS – PROGRAMME THREE

Presenter: Suzanne Taylor

Produced & written by: Kazimierz Janowski & Carmela DiClemente

BA: Julia Adamson

Recording date: 2.10.00

Presenter Welcome to Creative Ways – a series for teachers and learners of literature inspired by the British Council Conference on the teaching of literature held at Oxford University each year. I'm Suzanne Taylor and in today's programme we look at how creative writing activities in the literature classroom can help students understand the creative processes authors go through when composing their work. We'll also see how the simple technique of writing an end to a text and comparing this with the original can widen students' appreciation and understanding of what they're studying. Hilary Jenkins, the British Council literature manager and organiser of the Oxford conference, explains the benefits of putting pen to paper creatively.

Hilary Jenkins If students can be made aware of the processes that the writer goes through by writing themselves or by being encouraged to write themselves then they have a much more interesting approach to the literature they read and it means they have a much more multi-dimensional approach to the literature they read and study.

Presenter For conference delegate Anjana Srivastava, part of this multi-dimensional approach involves helping students unravel meaning.

Anjana Srivastava It is important for students to understand the choices that are available to a particular creative writer and that he chooses a particular word for a particular purpose. Unless they understand the creative process there's no way that they can get into the text and try and understand significances in the text. (*Duration 0'17"*)

Presenter Professor Rob Pope of Oxford Brooks University, takes the relationship between writing and meaning one step further. He says that it's important to make teachers and students realise that writing and reading are both active processes. For him, grasping the meaning of a text always involves a mental form of rewriting so by physically writing students naturally consolidate and complement this process.

Rob Pope People tend to separate off reading on the one hand from writing on the other as if they were separate processes and they also tend to think that reading is a passive activity whereas writing is something active. In fact every time that we open a book or for that matter listen to somebody speak it's an active engagement – we are translating and in some way transforming, in our own minds, what they're saying. In that respect reading is a form of re-writing, always. It's not that we have a choice in there, we have a choice about how we do it but we are already doing it all the time. This is a really important insight because it allows us to engage students and ourselves in active and

indeed amongst themselves interactive processes, not simply looking for the single meaning that's given out by the teacher or that they get from the critical book but recognising themselves as the active producers of meaning - they have a stake in it. (*Duration: 1'00"*)

Presenter Practical approaches for getting students to write creatively were shared by delegates throughout the Oxford conference. Jürgen Ronthaler, a delegate from Germany, explained how he had asked his students to provide beginnings and endings to various texts.

Jürgen Ronthaler It was a kind of workshop in the sense that we made a seminar on contemporary British and American novels and considering particularly beginnings and endings in a more lively way than just discussing in a scholarly fashion the novels at hand. So we asked the students to write a beginning and an ending each and gave them the task one week before we actually collected them and had them reading it out. (*Duration: 0' 29"*)

Presenter He was surprised by the way the students responded to the activity - first of all by their willingness to write – creative writing not being common in German classrooms and secondly by their eagerness to read out their efforts in class. The texts were placed in a folder for all to read and then used for further work.

Jürgen Ronthaler Yeh, I think the benefit in making them write something themselves was first to see how careful you have to consider as a writer or potential novelist the strategies of beginnings and endings and that in the good old sense of Edgar Allen Poe you have in the beginning to think of the ending. (*Duration 0'17"*)

Presenter You're listening to Creative Ways from the BBC World Service.
Today, we're talking about helping students understand the creative process that writers go through by encouraging them to write themselves. We heard earlier how writing can help students engage with the texts they're studying and so help them unravel layers of meaning within those texts. In the next part of the programme, writer Beverley Naidoo, with the help of students and a teacher at the BBC English Summer School, takes us through the stages of a lesson which involves students writing the end to a short story. Beverley Naidoo believes that this kind of writing activity can help students become aware of the values projected within a text – something which she, as a writer, feels very strongly about.

Beverley Naidoo I as a writer always am terribly conscious of the values from which I'm starting and with where I'm placing my characters and also where I hope to place my readers. I write – a lot of my writing is for young people. Now, of course, my readers may not choose to go where I am leading them – they may well be resistant readers but nevertheless it's something that I actually think about and perhaps this is something that authors who are writing for young people do think about perhaps rather more, particularly when you are

80 dealing with very deep, social issues as quite a lot of my writing is and the question then for me as the author is – what kind of ending can I give this story? I want it to be an ending which has some hope but actually I would be doing a disservice to the readers if I was going to be unrealistic in that hope. (*Duration 0'55"*)

Presenter Here now is Beverley Naidoo to explain the stages of the text completion lesson she demonstrated at a workshop in Oxford and which we tried out with our Summer School students. The activity moves from reading to writing and finally to discussion.

Beverley Naidoo I read the participants Suniti Namjoshi's story 'The Bride' from her Blue Donkey Fables. It's only a two paragraph story and I read them the first paragraph and asked them then to create the second – the idea is that they will then in pairs work out an ending and begin to explore some of the things that actually writers do. (*Duration: 0'23"*)

'The Bride' Part 1, read by Joan Walker
The Bride by Suniti Namjoshi

95 Once upon a time there was a proud young prince and he had reason to be proud. He was heir to the kingdom, he was handsome and healthy, he had been extremely well-educated and all the social graces that could be reasonably be taught had been carefully inculcated. What was more, his father was a King and his father's father and his father before that so that his right to rule was undisputed. Now when it was time for this young man to marry he said to his father "Father you have always said that only the best was good enough for me. I have the best falcons and the best hounds and the best stallions in all the world. But where will you find a bride who is worthy of me?" (*Duration: 0'52"*)

100 I think everyone immediately knew that they were into the genre of fairytale, of 'proud young prince' who was going to look for a wife and the reason for asking them to finish it is to see what kind of values they would actually bring to their ending – that was my main reason. (*Duration: 0'17"*)

Classroom How do you know it's a fairytale?
110 **Actuality** Once upon a time – That's it yes. Different languages have different beginnings. How would you say that in Spanish ?... in French we say... (*Duration: 0'23"*)

Beverley Naidoo After I read it to them they then had about fifteen minutes to work in pairs to come up with an ending and sort out differences. (*Duration: 0'06"*)

Classroom Did he... did he have a choice? To be different?
115 **Actuality** I don't like him, I'm not interested in him. I do like... (*Duration: 0'11"*)

Beverley Naidoo For some people it seems there was a little bit of a problem where they had differences in their authorial perspectives – to come up with an ending which would continue within that genre. (*Duration: 0'12"*)

Classroom
120 **Actuality** I would like you to finish it in about a hundred words, no more just to write down how you think the story continues. And a lot of this will depend on how you think the character of the Prince needs to be developed... So finally we will get a wife for him? Well we'll see. (Laughter) (*Duration: 0'26"*)

Beverley Naidoo Afterwards we listened to some of the different endings. (*Duration: 0'06"*)

Classroom
125 **Actuality** First he invited the ten daughters from the best and most powerful families surrounding his kingdom. The prince talked to them but he couldn't make a decision. The first one was not pretty enough, the second was too quiet the third couldn't speak his language and so on. The father tried it again with other daughters from the most powerful families in the country... (*FADE – Duration: 0'25"*)

130 **Beverley Naidoo** And then I read them the author's ending.

'The Bride' Part 2

135 The king didn't think that this would be much of a problem. He had contests instituted throughout the kingdom. There were contests for beauty and contests for strength and contests for knowledge and intelligence and wit and there were skill testing contests for all sorts of things such as archery and music. When the tests were done the winners of the contest were presented to the Prince. He looked them over – their credentials were good, indeed he began to be afraid that their credentials were better than his. "These women have excelled," he said to his father, "but they seem to be lacking in the womanly qualities." "Well of course," said his father, "I have weeded these out, you can now choose from those who did not compete." (*Duration: 0'49"*)

140 I think everyone was very surprised at the way she'd ended it because actually what she has done is to invert the traditional fairy tale and most people I think had actually given a rather – whatever their ending it was to do with passing on certain personal moral values, either bringing the prince down a peg or two or allowing him to have his way. (*Duration: 0'25"*)

Vox Pops
150 It was just not what you expected...
It was short and easy to read and there was a twist in the end and I like stories with funny twists in the end because it's almost like there's a moral behind it all...
I feel sad really, that he can't marry a woman who's better than him...
Oh I think he's looking for someone who'll be submissive and quiet and wash up and dry up and prepare the meal for the husband when he comes back. He doesn't want a superwoman who'll shoot and run and throw people to the ground. (*Duration: 0'34"*)

Beverley Naidoo No one quite did what Suniti did which is to actually get us to analyse – to carry us on thinking that this is a traditional tale but finally in the last analysis to twist it around and get us to think 'Oh dear, this is the nature of society and that all the tests that were carried out were actually to select out rather than in. (*Duration: 0'20"*)

- Presenter** Beverley Naidoo with a step-by-step account of how she uses the creative writing potential of students to explore some deep social issues in Suniti Namjoshi's text – 'The Bride'. The activity is useful because it shows students how much they already know about the genre – very few people have difficulty in actually continuing in the style in which the story has begun because everyone has heard these kind of stories before. It also helps people understand the value perspective of the author. But above all, it's the creative writing which starts students thinking, a point not lost on Egyptian conference delegate, Abdel-Moneim Sallam.
- 165
- Abdel-Moneim Sallam** When you go to literature in a passive way, just to understand silently, read to yourself, that sort of thing, the gain is not much but when you approach literature creatively then the chances are that you understand better, you contribute a lot and you help your students. (*Duration: 0'25"*)
- 170
- Presenter** Abdel-Moneim Sallam with that final word on the value of approaching the study of literature creatively – join me Suzanne Taylor next time for more Creative Ways.
- 175

CREATIVE WAYS FOUR

Characters

Overview

The focus in this section is on characters and characterisation, carrying on from the last activity of Creative Ways Three. John le Carré once said: ‘ “The cat sat on the mat” is not a story but “The cat sat on the dog’s mat” is.’ Narratives and dramatic scenes depend on the characters they present and the conflict between them, be that a conflict that is given by the situation or by the traits of the characters themselves. Similarly, the impact of poems often depends on characterisation or characters they represent, a phenomenon Helen Vendler refers to as ‘constructing a self’. Like in narratives or in drama, it is important that the ‘lyric speaker’ is credible, which means that s/he has to have facets like a real human being (or not so human as we shall see), facets that make it possible to explore this character outside the framework of the literary text. This exploration, which can be helpful for the understanding of how the character acts and speaks in the text, can be effected through the technique of ‘hotseating’ demonstrated by Beverly Naidoo in the broadcast.

Hotseating benefits from using some elements of method acting, the technique by which actors attempt to put themselves into the shoes of the character they have to enact, by developing her/his biography, exploring their motivation and hang-ups. To a small degree, the two warm-up activities are based on this technique and prepare the ground for hotseating proper as presented in the broadcast.

In ‘Working with the Broadcast’ the technique of hotseating is introduced, first in the way Beverley Naidoo uses it in the primary class room with her novel *Journey to Jo’burg*. The question is raised if and to what degree her technique needs adapting to a literary class room. The suggestion for hotseating in this part contain suggestions for changes and adaptations for a student audience.

In ‘Developing the Skills’ the idea of hotseating is taken up again, this time placing the hotseated characters outside the text, imagining them in their ‘private life’ as it were. Developing a character, this time from a picture input is the objective of the second exercise, with the aim of using that character as a mouthpiece. The last exercise takes this idea up again, but uses a non-human character as a starting point. In all of these activities the idea is to project oneself into someone or, in the case of the last exercise into something outside oneself.

Warm-up

GUESS WHO?

Objective	To explore playfully the concept of hotseating as presented in the broadcast
Organisation	Plenary or in groups
Material	–
Remarks	a) Students may need some guidance about what questions to ask to make the game interesting b) This exercise could be done in connection with a novel or a play that is being done/has just been done in class.

- 1 The teacher or one of the students is given the job of picking a character from a text that has just been read or is being read in class and to think her-/himself into this character as thoroughly as possible.
- 2 In the meantime the other students put together a list of searching questions about the character, e.g. “what is your greatest triumph?”, “what is your biggest disappointment?”, but also questions like “if you were an animal, what animal would you be?”
- 3 The final objective is to guess who the character is, but also to gain as much information about him or her. The teacher or the student in the hotseat have the right not to answer certain questions if this would bring the game to an early and unimaginative end.

MAKING CHARACTERS MEET

Objective	To develop a character and to learn to see the world through this character’s eyes
Organisation	First plenary, then pair work
Material	One card per student (A5 or A6), a smaller card per pair
Remarks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Suggest students keep the characters they are to create, and the locations where the characters meet, not too outlandish or surreal. b) The dialogue between the two characters can be done orally or in writing.

- 1 First brainstorm on the board what pieces of information would be of interest if one wanted to get to know a person well. Encourage students to go beyond that which you would have on a passport form and to include things such as ‘ambitions (fulfilled and frustrated)’, ‘biggest disappointment’, ‘proudest moment’, etc.
- 2 Then each student creates a character on the card using the categories brainstormed.
- 3 On the smaller card two students together agree on a location.
(Keep this location fairly mundane: a bar, a living room at the end of a party, etc.)
- 4 The cards are collected, shuffled and redistributed. Each pair gets two character cards and one location card.
- 5 In pairs they improvise a scene between their characters on the location they have been given. Care should be taken that the students are ‘in character’.

Working with the Broadcast

NOW LISTEN TO THE BROADCAST AND THINK ABOUT THESE QUESTIONS. THEN WORK THROUGH THE ACTIVITIES. THE TEXT OF THE BROADCAST IS INCLUDED AT THE END OF EACH CHAPTER.

What are the advantages of hotseating? (*Script 1-12*)

What do we know about the character of Mrs Foster, Madam, in the novel Beverley Naidoo hotseats? (*Script 17-39/54-59*)

What are the practical implications when Beverley Naidoo hotseats Mrs Foster? (*Script 50-54/60-64*)

What strategies does 'Mrs Foster' use to deflect questions? (*Script 70-81/90-100*)

How does Beverley Naidoo end hotseating Mrs Foster and what are her reasons for doing it this way? (*Script 106-125*)

How could hotseating be used in connection with other literary texts? (*Script 132-150*)

Would the Beverley Naidoo approach to hotseating make sense in a different classroom situation (i.e. not primary school children)? Are there ways in which it could/should be adapted?

IN THE HOTSEAT

Objective	To get a better insight into a literary character and to learn to see the world through this character's eyes
Organisation	Plenary
Material	–
Remarks	a) It may make sense to put the teacher in the hotseat. However, there are also very good reasons to choose a student for this. b) It might be interesting to use a minor character and explore her/his views of the narrative, or a not very deeply involved I-narrator (e.g. Lockwood in <i>Wuthering Heights</i>) to explore the role/reliability of the narrator.

- 1 The students decide on a character they want to put in the hotseat. They also decide who's to act the character.
- 2 The student or teacher to assume the role is given time to prepare (possibly as homework).
- 3 In the meantime the class individually or in groups prepare questions they would like to ask. In order to avoid trite or obvious questions, a certain number, e.g. ten for a group or five for individual students should be prepared. (Obviously not all of them will be used in class)
- 4 The character in the hotseat is questioned and has to reply as that character.
- 5 Afterwards the class may ask the student or teacher why certain questions were answered in a particular way, followed by a general discussion as to whether the class agrees with the way the character was presented.

Variation: The same task can be given to two students who are quizzed side by side. Afterwards the class discusses which of the two characters they found more plausible and for what reasons.

Developing the Skills

AFTER THE BALL IS OVER ...

Objective	To use character features of protagonists in a literary text and give them a life outside the text
Organisation	Plenary or in groups
Material	–
Examples	Tom Stoppard's 'Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern are Dead,' Elizabeth Bishop's 'Crusoe in England'
Remarks	This can be a light-hearted attempt at rewriting while retaining an analytical look at a literary text. A possibility here is to imagine what would have happened if certain plots had ended differently, e.g. if Romeo and Juliet had not killed themselves.

- 1 Students are asked to take characters from literary texts, e.g. Robinson and Friday from *Robinson Crusoe*, Olivia and Sebastian/Viola and Orsino/Sir Toby Belch and Maria/Malvolio from 'Twelfth Night,' Lucie and Darnay from *Tale of Two Cities*, one of the crew, the Hermit or the detained wedding guest in 'The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner'
- 2 They draw up portraits of the characters using the features and traits these characters exhibit in the text.
- 3 Then, with these characters, they visualise a scene, which is not presented in the text itself or might occur after the 'end' of the text. The final stage is to compose, either as a dialogue or as a narrative, the scene and how the characters interact.

Variation: Students could be asked to choose a minor character in a literary text and tell the story from this person's point of view.

THAT'S ME IN THE CORNER

Objective	To assume a role and to present the scene in which one finds oneself from that point of view
Organisation	Plenary with individual work
Material	Reproductions of classic paintings, for example postcards from a gallery or photographs.

Examples U. A. Fanthorpe 'Not my best side', David Dabydeen 'The Ballad of the Little Black Boy'

Remarks Most collections of photos or catalogues of exhibitions may provide input for this activity.

- 1 Lay out the pictures or reproduction of paintings and let students choose one.
- 2 They pick one of the characters in the painting and make a list of what features, physical and psychological, the character has.
- 3 Then they try to determine how the character feels about the other people in the painting and about the scene.
- 4 Then they try to imagine what the character might be thinking or saying.
- 5 Finally they try to write a story or a poem in the first person incorporating the points assembled in 2 to 4.

ANIMAL VEGETABLE MINERAL (PROSOPOPOEIA)

Objective To try to see the world from a highly unusual perspective

Organisation Plenary or in groups

Material One small card per students

Examples 'Hawk Roosting' by Ted Hughes, 'Hyena', or the 'Radish was Huge' by Edwin Morgan

Remarks If students have absolutely no idea about what to do with the word they have picked they should be allowed to write about what they put on their card.

- 1 Students are asked to imagine an animal, a plant or a mineral (or an object) that plays an interesting role in life, either in nature or in contact with humans.
- 2 On a card they write down the name of this animal, vegetable or mineral. On the back they write whether it is 'animal,' 'mineral' or 'vegetable,' depending on their choice.
- 3 The cards are collected and students are asked to pick a card, preferably not their own.
- 4 Individually they brainstorm what aspects about this animal, plant or mineral make it special, poignant, intriguing, etc.
- 5 Then they write a text from the animal's/vegetable's/mineral's point of view. Care should be taken to make this viewpoint as tangible as possible, but saying "I'm a..." should be avoided, especially at the beginning.

CREATIVE WAYS – PROGRAMME FOUR

Presenter: Suzanne Taylor

Produced & written by: Kazimierz Janowski & Carmela DiClemente

BA: Julia Adamson

Recording date: 09.10.00

Beverley Naidoo It seems to me perfectly appropriate that students should be encouraged to play around with their responses to the text. I believe it will actually deepen their experience of the text, we're making literature alive then, we're not just saying it's a dead thing that has just got one meaning. (*Duration 0'28"*)

5 I think hot-seating as a technique encourages young people to make real the drama in the story.

Presenter This is Creative Ways and today we'll be looking at hot-seating – a valuable technique for those who teach literature and want to involve their learners more in the drama and narrative of the text they're reading. We've just heard from author Beverley Naidoo – she believes readers should be encouraged to play around with texts, interact with characters and see stories as living dramas, not fixed and immutable. And we'll be hearing from her as she illustrates techniques for doing this with primary pupils at a school in London.

10
15 Beverley Naidoo grew up in South Africa, the country in which her first book – 'Journey to Jo'burg' – is set. She came to England in 1965 and returned freely for the first time in 1991 – after Nelson Mandela's release from jail and her book 'Journey to Jo'burg' had been 'unbanned'.

20 Naledi and Tiro were worried – their baby sister Dineo was ill, very ill. For three days now Nono their granny had been trying to cool her fever with damp cloths placed on her little head and body Mmangwane – their Aunty – made her take sips of water but still their sister lay hot and restless crying softly at times.

25 "Can't we take Dineo to the hospital?" Naledi begged, but Nono said Dineo was much too sick to be carried that far the only hospital was many miles away and Naledi also knew they had no money to pay a doctor to visit them - no-one in the village had that much money. If only Mma was here Naledi wished over and over as she and Tiro walked down to the village with their empty buckets. (*Duration: 0'47"*)

30 **Presenter** Mma (Pron: MAH) is a black maid who works far from her home for a white family in Jo'burg. Her children live 300 kilometres away. For a long time the law forced lots of families to live apart as many parents from the countryside had to work in the towns and cities. When Mma's youngest child becomes ill, her other children – Naledi (NAH-LAIR-DI) and Tiro (TEE-RO) set off for
35 the big city – Johannesburg, to find her.

We invited Beverley Naidoo to Berger Primary School in London, where, having read and enjoyed the story, the children were keen to explore the

40 issues that 'Journey to Jo'burg' raises. For Beverly Naidoo it's terribly important that the class understand something of the politics and history of the country in which the story is set. Here she outlines how she does that...

Beverley Naidoo (*Duration 0'58"*)

& class I start with playing a piece of music it's the national anthem now – the South African national anthem ...Africa.

45 Where do you think this piece of music might be being sung ?
And what kind of music do you think it is ?

I get them to imagine that if we'd been in South Africa a number of years ago if someone had overheard that and been a Government supporter, chances are we'd have had the Police down on us. I get them already playing the imagination game – to imagine what would happen if.

50 **Presenter** The music serves as a prompt to discussion of the political situation in South Africa, both now and at the time in which 'Journey to Jo'burg' is set. Once the class understand something of the context, they're ready to talk directly with a character from the story. This is what hot-seating allows students to do – to question a fictional character – a part played by the teacher, a student or – in this case – the author. In the hot-seat is Beverly Naidoo, assuming the role of Mma's white employer, or Madam, Mrs Foster.

Beverley Naidoo (*Duration 0'54"*)

& Reading from 'Journey to Joburg' 60 When I play the Madam I set it up very carefully indeed because basically I'm playing the racist, a racist who smiles a lot, and I want the children to be very clear that this is not me, that this is a role I'm playing and that I'm not endorsing this, what I'm actually saying, and that and I'm actually putting them in a position to challenge.

"Madam, my little girl is very sick – Can I go home to see her?"

65 The Madam raised her eyebrows. "Well, Joyce. I can't possibly let you go today I need you tonight to stay in with Belinda – the Master and I are going to a very important dinner party" she paused "I suppose you can go tomorrow" "Thank you Madam" "I hope you realise how inconvenient this will be for me. If you are not back in a week I shall just have to look for another madam, you understand ?" "Yes, Madam."

70 **Presenter** What's important is for the class to be aware that the author or teacher is in a role – basically they're playing a part – playing a character that's probably very different from their own.

75 To emphasise this shift from author to Madam, Beverly Naidoo leaves the room briefly. When she reappears she's in character – she changes her appearance by wearing a hat or holding a bag, alters her voice and inflects her mannerisms.

And then, the questions begin...

Beverley Naidoo (*Duration 0'57"*)
& class "Right now who's got the first question ? Yes you have. Yes..."

80 The questions that are most effective that children ask are when they start asking 'If 'If you were so and so', 'if that was you'
 "If you were Tiro and Nalidi's mother how would you feel if you got the news?"
 "Now how old are you my dear?"

85 "Ten."
 "It might be a little difficult for them to understand Miss Gordon, being just 10, because we have different money in South Africa, we have something called the Rand and now we have about – oh our money value's going down all the time..."

90 **Presenter** You're listening to Creative Ways from the BBC World Service – a series based on the British Council teachers of literature conference, held in Oxford each year. Today, we're talking about hot-seating. By assuming the identity of a fictional character, the teacher can enable children to engage with the texts they're studying and so help them uncover layers of meaning within

95 those texts. In the next part, writer Beverley Naidoo continues with the lesson based around her novel 'Journey to Jo'Burg'. She believes that this kind of activity – hot-seating – can help students become aware of the values projected within a text – something which she, as a writer, feels very strongly about...

100 **Beverley Naidoo** (*Duration: 2'05"*)
class & reading It's terribly important that young people are put into real situations where they learn how to argue they learn how to question not just to accept what they hear
 "You didn't answer my question that I asked you before."
 105 "And that was?"
 "How would you feel if you got the news about your daughter dying?"
 "Ask me about things that really happened to me – I find 'If' questions very hard to deal with because I don't have that imagination anymore – you young people all have such wonderful imagination. Next question."
 110 "If you knew that Nalidi's..."
 "Another 'if'question! I can't answer 'if'."
 They were lucky to find space on a bench, next to the young woman with the baby. She didn't look much older than Grace thought Nalidi. It was the young woman who spoke first "It's always long to wait I was here before with my
 115 baby and now he's sick again" "What's the problem ?" Mma asked " Last time the doctor said he must have more milk but I've no money to buy it" Mma sighed
 "I think it's the same sickness with my child" (*Duration: 0'28"*)
 In the end I will wait for a particularly effective question and say I'm not
 120 prepared to be her any longer and say now this is me. Now let's talk about

her, how did she make you feel, what did you notice about her? And sometimes there are children there who have been silent throughout but who are incredibly articulate at this point they've been almost enraged by this character but are released at that point and can say how they actually feel about the character and what she was doing

125 “Do you think she answered people’s questions?”
 “No I think she answered very rudely. Very rudely.”
 “Yes, OK, what else? What about the way she avoided some of your questions. Yes, Susan. When we said If she was trying to avoid answering the question for some reason... she certainly was... *(fade out)*

130 **Presenter** That final debriefing stage is, Beverley Naidoo believes, essential. It’s not enough to question a character, children also need to reflect on that character’s responses and decide whether the person they have just met – the one sitting in the hot-seat – differed from the character on the page. Hot-seating provides the ideal forum for assessing student understanding of a text too. As your students talk to and about the character, it should become clear just how familiar they are with the story and how much they understand. By using hot-seating as a prompt for creative writing, you can also allow your students to continue the drama, as Beverley Naidoo suggests.

135 First though, class teacher Diane, who encouraged her students to write profiles of Mma, Mrs Foster, Naledi, Tiro, Grace and the other characters in ‘Journey to Jo’burg’.

140 **Beverley Naidoo student and teacher** We decided who were the main characters and then we looked at their characteristics based on what we’d read in the text and then the children just basically charted this person is like this because when they did this, x,y,z
 145 *(Duration 0’23”)*
 Grace is a person who is against the situation in South Africa and thinks that if the whites are free to do whatever they want black people should be too...

150 **Presenter** The activity lends itself to other texts. Indian teacher Renuka Rajaratnam was one of those delegates at the British Council Conference in Oxford who, after attending the workshop run by Beverley Naidoo, felt inspired to try out the techniques with other texts. Here she talks about using it with William Shakespeare’s Hamlet, and in particular to find out more about the character of Gertrude.

155 **Renuka Rajaratnam** I would come in like Gertrude and speak to my students and say ‘what do you think of me in terms of my relationship with my first husband ?’, ‘Do you think I had a role in the murder which was most foul in the play, and what do you think my son would have thought of me?’ You know those are the kind of things are the questions that I would like to elicit from my students
 160 *(Duration 1’10”)*

Note: John McRae points out that orchids are the national flower of Singapore and that the poem is banned in Singapore.

Beverley Naidoo This is a technique that can be used with many texts – I mean for instance if you were teaching Jane Eyre why not hotseat Mr Rochester and if you were teaching Othello why not hotseat Iago? I think one’s encouraging students to realise that there are also interpretations of these characters. It moves away from the kind of transmission mode of teaching, saying this is what this means, this is what this character is, but allows the student more chance to use their own interpretation but then afterwards I think it’s really important to look at those interpretations and see do they really hold. Ultimately you come back to the text but the playing is going to enable you a much more creative reader and also, who knows, writer.
Tell us now what things you like writing about.

165

170

Student 1 I like writing about my birthdays, I like writing poems, Poetry, great!

Student 2 I like writing autobiographies, adventures, happy things

175

Presenter Today’s Creative Ways looked at how hot-seating can extend students’ understanding of and involvement in a text – which was demonstrated by writer Beverly Naidoo. Next time we’ll hear ideas about how to train students to deal with new and unfamiliar language. So do join us then.

CREATIVE WAYS FIVE

(Re)Construction

Overview

This section concentrates on strategies for working out how poems are structured although it is possible to use the same strategies for narratives as well as for drama. There are of course various ways in which we can discover the structure of a literary text, but in the following we will, in one form or another, approach structure through language. Some of the strategies suggested imply ‘doctoring’ texts, a way of dealing with literary works that may make some teachers somewhat uneasy. However, students tend to be a little less worried about playing with poems, and the main benefit is that some of their elements can be worked out quite effectively as experience shows. What is also at least somewhat different in this section is that the activities presented here mainly require reading before writing unlike the other activities where the sequence is not so important (*see Introduction*).

In the ‘Warm-up’ we are going to explore a well-known W.H. Auden poem and a Walt Whitman poem in terms of their line (and stanza) breaks.

In ‘Working with the Broadcast’ the focus is on a poem by Singapore poet Hilary Tham. Because of the way this activity is featured in the broadcast, the usual general questions follow rather than precede the reading/writing activity.

In ‘Developing the Skills’ we take the idea of the activity presented in the broadcast one step further by using the technique of jigsaw reading with a A.E. Housman love poem. Then, in an activity which may seem rather destructive we shall try to discover how poets create specific effects with their writing. This part also contains two activities that represent somewhat unorthodox ways of reading and rewriting literary texts, inspired by a) the presentation at the Oxford Conference of first draft of Shelley’s ‘Ozymandias’ and b) an analysis of Blake’s ‘The Fly’. We round the section off with an activity that requires detailed reading and, on the basis of the analysis, rewriting the text.

Warm-up

BREAKING THE LINES

Objective	To explore the structure of a poem and how line breaks can be used to create specific effects
Organisation	Group work
Material	Poems printed as if they were prose texts (see below)
Remarks	a) Basically any poems will do here as there are various line/stanza breaking strategies (two interesting ones are Philip Larkin's 'Mr Bleaney' and Alan Brownjohn's 'Common Sense', a wonderful use of <i>textes trouvés</i>) b) The aim is not to recreate exactly how the poem was originally written, as this is sometimes impossible, especially with free verse, but to discuss the effects resulting from specific decisions.
Texts	'Funeral Blues' by W.H.Auden and 'When I heard the Learn'd Astronomer' by Walt Whitman

- 1 The class is divided into the same number of teams as there are poems (i.e. for three poems three groups will be needed). Then the teams are split up into smaller groups (between two and four students per group).
- 2 The students are given a copy of the prose version of one of the poems, each team working on one poem.
- 3 In the groups they rewrite the texts putting in the line and stanza breaks where they think they are suitable.
- 4 Then they compare their version first with another group or in the team.
- 5 Later, perhaps in the next session all students get the verse version of all the poems and in recombined groups discuss the student versions against the versions written by the poets.

Text 1

1

Funeral Blues *by W. H. Auden*

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone, prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone, silence the pianos and with muffled drum bring out the coffin, let the mourners come. Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead. Put crepe bows round the white necks of public doves, let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves. He was my North, my South, my East and West. My working week and my Sunday rest, my noon, my midnight, my talk, my song; I thought that love would last forever; I was wrong. The stars are not wanted now: put out every one; pack up the moon and dismantle the sun; pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood; for nothing now can ever come to any good.

2

Funeral Blues *by W. H. Auden*

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,

Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead Scribbling on
the sky the message He Is Dead.

Put crepe bows round the white necks of public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West.

My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last forever; I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

Text 2

1

When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer *by Walt Whitman*

When I heard the learn'd astronomer, when the proofs, the figures were ranged in columns before me, when I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them, when I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room, how soon unaccountable I became tired and sick, till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself, in the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time, looked up in perfect silence at the stars.

2

When I heard the Learn'd Astronomer

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and the diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them;
When I, sitting, heard the astronomer, where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon, unaccountable, I became tired and sick;
Till rising and gliding out, I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars

NOW LISTEN TO THE BROADCAST AND THINK ABOUT THESE QUESTIONS. THEN WORK THROUGH THE ACTIVITIES. THE TEXT OF THE BROADCAST IS INCLUDED AT THE END OF EACH CHAPTER.

Why is the technique of gap filling useful for working with literary texts?
(*Script 18-25 and 138-146*)

How exactly did John McRae set up this activity? (*Script 31-39*)

What movements or contrasts can be observed in the first stanza? (*Script 44-47*)

What can be observed in the second stanza (*Script 57-58*)

How about the third stanza? (*Script 63-67*)

What approaches to filling the gaps are represented in the responses of the participants?
(*Script 79-89*)

What are John McRae's views about the final stanza? (*Script 93-101*)

How did the participants approach the last stanza? (*Script 102-112*)

What approaches to filling the gaps are represented in the responses of the participants?
(*Script 79-89*)

Working with the Broadcast

MIND THE GAP

Objective	To develop an understanding for the structure of a poem by trying to fill in strategically placed gaps
Organisation	Plenary or in groups
Material	The text of the poem with blanks substituted for specific words or phrases and the last line blanked out (<i>see version after the general question</i>)
Remarks	a) This activity is based entirely on the work of John McRae as featured in the broadcast b) Obviously many other poems can be approached in the same way, e.g. Andrew Young's 'The Dead Crab'. c) It may be helpful to use some of John McRae's points about the individual stanzas as raised in the broadcasts.

- 1 Hand out a copy of the poem with the gaps.
- 2 Ask the students either individually or in groups to complete the text by filling in the blanks.
- 3 Get the students to present their results and the reasons for their decisions.
- 4 Compare the suggestions for the final lines and the implications these suggestions have on the meaning of the poem.
5. Compare the student versions with the original version and discuss the merits.

Offerings by Hilary Tham

I came to you at _____
With silvery dew on sleeping lotus
Sparkling in my gay hands
You put my flowers in the sun

I danced to you at _____
With bright raintree blooms
Flaming in my ardent arms
You dropped my blossoms in the pond

I crept to you at _____
With pale lilac orchids
Trembling on my uncertain lips
You shredded my petals in the sand

I strode to you at _____
With gravel hard and cold
Clenched in my bitter fists
You offered me your hybrid orchids
And _____

Offerings by Hilary Tham

I came to you at sunrise
With silvery dew on sleeping lotus
Sparkling in my gay hands
You put my flowers in the sun

I danced to you at midday
With bright raintree blooms
Flaming in my ardent arms
You dropped my blossoms in the pond

I crept to you at sunset
With pale lilac orchids
Trembling on my uncertain lips
You shredded my petals in the sand

I strode to you at midnight
With gravel hard and cold
Clenched in my bitter fists
You offered me your hybrid orchids
And I crushed them in my despair

Developing the Skills

JIGSAW READING

Objective	To explore the language of a poem for clues as to how it is structured
Organisation	Group work
Material	“When I was one-and-twenty” cut up into strips (<i>see below</i>), one set per group sticky tape and pins to hang up the final versions
Remarks	a) It may be useful to establish the meaning of “in vain”. b) Most poems with a linguistically clearly discernible structure can be used here, as well as some songs (e.g. ‘Streets of London’ by Ralph McTell or Eric Bogle’s First World War song ‘The Band Played Waltzing Mathilda’).

- 1 Give the students the title ‘When I was one-and-twenty’ and ask them what this poem could be about.
- 2 Hand out the poem cut into strips to the groups and ask them to order the lines.
- 3 Get the groups to write down in note form on what they base their decisions for placing a line in the position they have.
- 4 The versions are stuck together and hung up around the room so the students can inspect them.
- 5 The class can then discuss the merits of the various versions and whether and where the poem has been divided into stanzas.

*But I was one-and-twenty
No use to talk to me

Give crowns and pounds and guineas
But not your heart away

When I was one-and-twenty
I heard him say again

And I am two-and-twenty
and oh, 'tis true, 'tis true

Give pearls away and rubies
But keep your fancy free

The heart out of the bosom
Was never given in vain

'Tis paid with sighs aplenty
and sold for endless rue

When I was one-and-twenty
I heard a wise man say*

When I was one-and-twenty
by A.E. Housman

When I was one-and-twenty
I heard a wise man say
‘Give crowns and pounds and guineas
But not your heart away;

Give pearls away and rubies
But keep your fancy free.’
But I was one-and-twenty,
No use to talk to me

When I was one-and-twenty
I heard him say again,
‘The heart out of the bosom
Was never given in vain;
‘Tis paid with sighs aplenty
And sold for endless rue.’
And I am two-and-twenty
And oh, ‘tis true, ‘tis true.

SAYING IT TO THE WORST EFFECT

Objectives	a) To see what makes a poetic line strong b) In the course of the exercise to discover what elements poets use to create a variety of effects
Organisation	Writing in pairs or groups followed by a plenary discussion
Material	A list of lines from poems or openings of narrative texts
Remarks	a) This may seem somewhat iconoclastic, but with guidance from the teacher it sharpens students' perception for poetic 'tricks of the trade'. b) One may need to point out to the students that the changes can be in the choice of vocabulary, in syntax, in punctuation, etc.

- 1 Hand out a number of poignant lines to the groups and ask them to make minimal changes to rob them of their poignancy.
- 2 In a plenary discussion analyse what the change for the trite can be ascribed to, i.e. where the words are no longer very apt, where momentum has been lost, where the focus of the line has shifted or become blurred, etc.

Examples

- a Whose woods these are I think I know. (*Robert Frost*)
- b The tide rises, the tide falls
The twilight darkens, the curlew calls. (*Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*)
- c I ne'er was struck before that hour
With love so sudden and so sweet (*John Clare*)
- d The Red Death had long devastated the country. (*Edgar Allan Poe*)
- e The curfew tolls the knell of parting day... (*Thomas Gray*)
- f No coward soul is mine... (*Emily Brontë*)
- g About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters... (*W.H. Auden*)
- h The world is charged with the grandeur of God (*Gerard Manley Hopkins*)
- i They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
They may not mean to, but they do. (*Philip Larkin*)
- j I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle (*Marianne Moore*)
- k She fears him and will always ask
What fated her to choose him (*Edwin Arlington Robinson*)
- l Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? (*William Shakespeare*)

m The big steel tourist shield says maybe
fifteen thousand got it here (*Dave Smith*)

n I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made (*William Butler Yeats*)

FIRST DRAFTS

Objectives	a) To study a (short) poetic text, focusing on its central elements b) To find other ways of saying the same thing
Organisation	Pair work, or matched pairs, i.e. groups of two and two participants so that pairs of students read and write together
Material	At least 2 suitable texts, it can be more, but there needs to be an even number.
Remarks	a) This can be a way of breathing new life into dead texts b) You may need to point out at the beginning that a first draft contains the basic ideas but not all the ideas are worked out yet.

- 1 Distribute the texts to the students making sure that pairs don't have the same text. The students read the text carefully and make a list of the ideas.
- 2 Next they can try to draw up a diagram of how the ideas are connected to each other.
- 3 The lists of ideas and the diagrams are swapped between the two partners.
- 4 On the basis of this material they attempt to write a first draft of the text (obviously without looking at the original)
- 5 Then they exchange the texts and compare the new version with the original one.
- 6 To round this off the students could be encouraged to discuss the differences between the versions and in what way they show parallels.

ENCAPSULATIONS

Objectives	a) To concentrate on the central elements/ideas of a literary text b) To rewrite a text as a new text (explore intertextuality)
Organisation	Group work
Material	Reasonably well-known texts or poems, perhaps classics, one copy per group
Examples	Any text in <i>How to become ridiculously well-read in one evening</i>
Remarks	The result of this activity ideally should be another poetic form, e.g. a haiku, a limerick, a tanka, a cinquain, a quatrain, a dramatic dialogue

- 1 Hand out copies of texts and get the groups to study them carefully, perhaps to underline the central ideas.
- 2 The students then draw up a list of the ideas, and reduce them to perhaps two or three central ones.
- 3 Then they decide on a form that would be ideal to bring out these central ideas and that may show them in an amusing light (see remarks).
- 4 Then they rewrite the text as an encapsulation.

Variations:

- 1 Another version of 'Ozymandias' was being written at the same time by Horace Smith, a completely forgotten poet. The students could try to write the trite poem that he could have written. (Then have a look at Smith's version).
- 2 William Wordsworth's sister Dorothy lived with him but was much less well known as a poet. She basically kept him on the rails. How would the poem of 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' have looked from her point of view?

**On a stupendous leg of Granite,
Discovered Standing by itself in the
Deserts of Egypt, with the Inscription
Inserted Below**

by Horace Smith

In Egypt's sandy silence, all alone,
Stands a gigantic Leg, which far off throws
The only shadow that the Desert knows.
'I am great Ozymandias,' saith the stone.
'The King of kings: this might city shows
The wonders of my hand.' The city's gone!
Naught but the leg remaining to disclose
The sight of that forgotten Babylon.
We wonder, and some hunter may express
Where London stood, holding the wolf in chase,
He meets some fragment huge, and stops to guess
What wonderful, but unrecorded, race
Once dwelt in that annihilated place. ¹

¹ Composed 1817 during a sonnet-writing competition with Percy Bysshe Shelley, who wrote 'Ozymandias' as a result, published 1818.

CREATIVE WAYS - PROGRAMME FIVE

Presenter: Suzanne Taylor

Produced & written by: Kazimierz Janowski & Carmela DiClemente

BA: Julia Adamson

Recording date: 19.10.00

- Presenter** Welcome to Creative Ways – a series for teachers and learners of literature inspired by the British Council Conference on the teaching of literature held at Oxford University each year...
- 5 I'm Suzanne Taylor, and in today's programme we'll be looking at how the simple activity of gap filling can raise language awareness and allow students to gain a deeper understanding of texts. Hilary Jenkins, the British Council literature manager and organiser of the Oxford conference explains that it is often the simplest classroom techniques which help students and teachers overcome their fear of literature. She reminds us that you don't have to be a user
- 10 of English as a foreign language to find literary vocabulary difficult...
- Hilary Jenkins** I think native speakers also find literature difficult, it looks different and the vocabulary is often different and of course there are all sorts of things hidden in it that the writer wants you to find but is not necessarily going to make it easy for you to find and I think teachers can help students find ways into texts – there
- 15 are methods that you can use as a reader to help yourself get into a text – there are some very simple things you can do which do not involve trying to work out the meaning of every word. (*Duration: 0'26"*)
- Presenter** Well, as any teacher will tell you, one of the simplest things you can do with a text is to blank out words and ask your students to fill them in. Professor John
- 20 McRae from the University of Nottingham tried out a gap-filling activity with the conference delegates, he told us why leaving words out in literature is a useful thing.
- John McRae** I find it useful to take words out, to ask students could the text stop there? What we are trying to develop is an awareness of how complex a process it is, reading,
- 25 especially if it's not in your own language and therefore instead of being intimidated by texts in a foreign language I want to give my readers the tools with which they can tackle any text they have to read. I want to give them the confidence with these tools to be able to read, think about, process, discuss and create. (*Duration: 0'35"*)
- 30 **Presenter** The text which John McRae used in his conference workshop was a poem – 'Offerings', by Hilary Tham, an Asian writer now living in America. The idea is to start work on the poem in the classroom without revealing the title or the author – this comes at the end. Here now is John Mc Rae to take us through the various stages of the gap-filling activity...
- 35 **John McRae** (*Duration: 3'49"*)
I cut out the final words of the first line of each stanza and then I only left one word in the final, final line of the whole poem, which is 'and' and then it's blank.

40 And I asked the class to read the text to themselves, I did not read it with
them, until the very end of the class. I asked them to see what was
happening in the text, to follow the movement through, trace what happens
to 'I' and in this particular text there's a lovely contrast between what 'I' does
and what 'you' does. 'I' does something in the first three lines of each stanza
and 'you' reacts, does something different. And therefore they were
45 processing silently and they were able to see the changes that are happening
between verbs and adjectives and gerunds. The first stanza with one or two
words missing at the end of the first line is:

I came to you at...
With silvery dew on sleeping lotus
Sparkling in my gay hands
50 *You put my flowers in the sun*

Now, what the reader gets there is the move between 'I' and 'You', the move
between something which seems pretty positive to something which might be
a reaction, might be negative, we're not quite sure yet. We've got the
evocation of 'sleeping lotus', we've got 'sparkling' then the time shifts, the
55 mood changes just a little bit

I danced to you at...
With bright raintree blooms
Flaming in my ardent arms
60 *You dropped my blossoms in the pond*

Now, what's happening here is that the verb 'I came to you' has changed to 'I
danced to you', which most people would read as more positive. The context of
the flowers and plants has remained 'bright rain-tree blooms', the gerund
which was 'sparkling'... 'flaming', rather more than sparkling, 'my ardent
arms' so lexically, in terms of the vocabulary used it's getting stronger, more
65 positive perhaps. Then there's a semi colon at the end of the third line and
'you dropped my blossoms in the pond', beginning to sound a bit more
negative perhaps. The third stanza is...

I crept to you at...
With pale lilac orchids
70 *Trembling on my uncertain lips*
You shredded my petals in the sand.

You can see the same thing is happening, the verbs are changing, the flowers
are changing, the adjectives, 'trembling' it was 'sparkling, flaming,
trembling'. The adjective in the third line was 'gay' then it was 'ardent' now
75 it's 'uncertain'. Now what happened when people were reading it was they
began noticing these things, they picked out all of these things I've
mentioned and then the final stanza:

*I strode to you at...
With gravel hard and cold
Clenched in my bitter fists
You offered me your hybrid orchids and...*

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And we left the last line blank. Now, the blanks in the first lines ‘at’, ‘I came to you at, I danced to you, I crept to you, I strode to you’, that’s what I asked people to creatively fill in and we got lots of suggestions...

85 **Presenter**

You’re listening to Creative Ways from the BBC World Service... Today, Professor John McRae is taking us through a gap-fill activity using Hilary Tham’s poem ‘Offerings’. Before we move on to the final line of the poem we’ll hear how three of the participants interpreted the gaps in the first lines of each of the stanzas...

90 **VJ Kumar**

Obviously I looked for something that could go well with the syntax so the choice was very limited because you can’t use several possibilities because they would be syntactically wrong. ...and so it had to come back to the various phases of the day.

95 **Franz Andres**

Most of the participants saw the predictability if you like to a degree in the poem by using times of the day. There were people who tried to dodge that and for example deliberately broke the style by sort of talking about six twenty-five or at a gallop or whatever which I thought was an interesting way of twisting the expectations.

100 **Anjana Srivastava**

I began looking at it as a happening in one day but it would be at a symbolic level for me. So it was ‘I came to you at morn, I came to you at noon, I came to you at dusk and I came to you at dark’, and the dark suddenly had a Frostian symbolism for me it suggests death. (*Duration 1’37”*)

105 **Presenter**

The important point to remember here is that the choices available to the readers in these first gaps are restricted because of the leaving in of the preposition ‘at’. This is not true of the final line. Here’s John and the participants to explain why...

110 **John McRae**

The final line caused all sorts of argument and discussion because everyone could see the progress of the verb, the adjective, the different flowers and it’s moving from ‘sparkling’ to ‘flaming’ to ‘trembling’ to ‘clenched’. From silvery dew on sleeping lotus, bright rain-tree blooms, pale lilac orchids to gravel, hard and cold. So, clearly there is a movement from positive to negative. Words which came up include things like acceptance and rejection. We discussed whether or not it was a love poem later we discussed whether or not it’s a political poem because in some contexts it is read politically. The last stanza ‘clenched in my bitter fists’ is the confirmation that it’s moving from some kind of positive to some kind of negative with gay, ardent then uncertain then bitter. (*Duration 2’22”*)

115

- 120 **Anjana Srivastava** The next line to which I have to respond ‘you offered me hybrid orchids’ and I, I filled it up like this pretty ambiguously, ‘I let you sleep by me’, meaning to say that I was dead now and by allowing him to lie by my grave stone I have settled all our misunderstandings, our quarrel in death. So the death settles the score.
- 125 **Franz Andres** Leaving out the final line in fact is interesting because it allows whoever fills in the final line to use his or her expectations as to how the poem should end. Whether there’s going to be as it were a happy ending or whether there’s going to be a kind of dire ending or whether once again you decide to break the expectation patterns and put something in that’s completely different .
- 130 **VJ Kumar** Hiding the last line was the most difficult part because the cycle was complete by the fourth stanza and so the last line had to be thought out completely, right? one had to go through the entire poem to come to the last line and the possibilities were too many.
- Presenter** And now let’s hear Joan Walker read the whole poem without the gaps...
- 135 ‘Offerings’ by Hilary Tham
I came to you at sunrise
With silvery dew on sleeping lotus
Sparkling in my gay hands
You put my flowers in the sun
- 140 I danced to you at midday
With bright raintree blooms
Flaming in my ardent arms
You dropped my blossoms in the pond
- 145 I crept to you at sunset
With pale lilac orchids
Trembling on my uncertain lips
You shredded my petals in the sand
- 150 I strode to you at midnight
With gravel hard and cold
Clenched in my bitter fists
You offered me your hybrid orchids
And I crushed them in my despair
- So now we’ve heard how a simple gap filling activity can get students creatively involved in the text they are studying. But what’s actually being learnt here? John McRae has an answer.
- 155 **John McRae** Now, what are students learning from all this playing around with texts? I feel that some teachers resist ‘playing’ as they would see it with texts because it’s distracting from some vague overall learning aim. First of all, I want to build the confidence of the reader in reading any kind of text in this

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way, questioning the text rewriting it because we are developing language ability, processing skills, creative skills and thinking skills. What I want to have as a result is that the readers, the students, the learners make progress as readers and are aware that they can read better, read more deeply, read with an awareness of the language, an awareness of the text, an awareness of the culture and an awareness perhaps above all of themselves as an active participant in the reading and creation of meaning. (*Duration 1'07"*)

165

Presenter

John McRae with some very good reasons for using gap-filling exercises in the literature classroom. And that's all from me, Suzanne Taylor, for now – join me next time for more Creative Ways.

CREATIVE WAYS SIX

Experience and Observation

Overview

In this section we shall explore reading and writing through making use of personal experience. 'Experience' is to be used somewhat loosely as the broadcast approaches it from two rather different angles: firstly, in connection with Shakespeare's Sonnet 73, which describes an emotion in terms of experiencing seasons, times of day and periods in one's life, thereby making the emotion presented more immediate and accessible because it can be linked to the reader's or listener's personal experience. However, as the broadcast shows, the approach to the text can and should be based on one's own experience as opposed to a purely critical analysis. Secondly, this episode explores experiences as a source of writing by plugging into memories and personal histories. Inevitably, some techniques explored in earlier episodes can also be applied in this context, e.g. using imagery and, in connection with memories of people, obviously, characterisation.

In the 'Warm-up' the students explore ways of describing a person using specific metaphors and simile related to their own experience. This is a lead-in for the activity suggested by Jon Cook in the broadcast. The second activity leads up to Helen Dunmore's activity about using personal memory as a starting point for writing a text.

'Working with the Broadcast' consists of two activities, firstly, Jon Cook's exploration of a Shakespeare sonnet and, secondly, Helen Dunmore's workshop activity on remembering an important woman and writing up the memory. The latter is linked to a few poems written by 20th century poets which could be considered in this context.

'Developing the skills' focuses on using personal experience and memory to explore topics like elderly people students may know, an event or feature repeated in family history and finally how to reduce an experience or an emotion into a highly constrained and stylised form. Here both strands of the programme, linking emotions to an image (here in nature) and memoir, are combined.

Warm-up

SHALL I COMPARE THEE TO A ...?

Objective	To use similes (and metaphors) to describe a person
Organisation	Group work
Material	A number of small cards per student or enough cue cards as supplied below for each group to get between five and ten cards.
Remarks	This is a variation of a well-known parlour/teaching game. No claim is made that it is an original invention...
Example	'What you are' by Roger McGough (excerpts)

- 1 Split the class up into groups of about five and hand out either the cue cards below or some small cards and ask them to write unusual things on them to which you could compare a person, which will then be collected.

- 2 Ask the students to think of a person. (This person could be real and well-known, it could be a character from a novel or a play, it could be a figure from history, etc.)
- 3 One student in each group is put in the interview chair, i.e. will be asked questions.
- 4 Now hand out a set of cards to each group with the writing covered up. These are uncovered in turn and read aloud.
- 5 The student in the interview chair answers the questions and the others try to guess who s/he has thought of. Obviously, most students should get an opportunity in the interview chair and the packets of cue cards should be exchanged between the groups.

Written variation: All students write down the answers and then put them into a fairly uniform manner, e.g. “She/he is...” or “you are”, which is read out and the other students try to guess who it is.

a drink	a television programme	a dish	a type of countryside	a vehicle	a piece of music
a time of day	a flower	an insect	a kind of weather	a season/time of year	a time of day
a period in life	a fruit	a musical instrument	a tool	a smell	the distance between...

AFTER THE HOLIDAYS

Objective	To describe an experience in one’s past in as sensuous and lively a manner as possible
Organisation	Group work
Material	–
Remarks	The answers a student gives could form the backbone of or starting point for a travel vignette or travel poem. The activity then serves as a brainstorming exercise.

- 1 All students cast their minds back to a holiday, a trip or an outing that was memorable for one reason or another. They need to try to remember as many facets of this as they can.
- 2 Then the students make up some questions that they would like to ask whoever will be in the interview chair about this holiday, trip or outing. Care should be taken to include questions on all the senses.
- 3 Then they prepare questions involving superlatives: “what was the most interesting, the scariest, etc thing on your...?”

4 Sitting in groups, one student is placed in the interview chair. The others ask her/him the prepared questions about the experience.

5 When the group is satisfied, the next person moves into the interview chair.

Variation: The same procedure can be used about a childhood experience, a memory from school, etc.

Working with the Broadcast

NOW LISTEN TO THE BROADCAST AND THINK ABOUT THESE QUESTIONS. THEN WORK THROUGH THE ACTIVITIES. THE TEXT OF THE BROADCAST IS INCLUDED AT THE END OF EACH CHAPTER.

What are the roles of critical thinking in the study/teaching of literature and where does creative writing/reading have a role to play? (*Script 1-10, 21-24*)

Why does it help to bring in personal experience into the study of literary texts? (*Script 11-17*)

In what terms does Shakespeare's sonnet 73 represent the self? What images are used to describe the speaker's emotions? (*Script 28-42, 50-55*)

What does conference participant Kavetsa Agadala write about as a response to Jon Cook's activity? (*Script 55-58*)

What does Jon Cook suggest as a good next step and how does it relate to traditional approaches of studying a literary text? (*Script 59-68*)

What do we find out about Virginia Woolf from the descriptions and the excerpt quoted in the broadcast? (*Script 89-100*)

What is it that the participant quoted (Adina Ciugureanu) thought about in the workshop and what did she feel about the writing that went on in the workshop? (*Script 112-120*)

What is Helen Dunmore's reasoning behind the uses of writing up a personal memory as an approach to studying Woolf's writing? (*Script 121-130*)

Generally, what are the uses of creative writing for the teaching of literature and working with literary texts? (*Script 137-143*)

THAT TIME OF YEAR THOU MAYST IN ME BEHOLD...

"...in the case of the Shakespeare sonnet that I was working with this morning, it has to do with representing the self in terms of a season or in terms of a scene or a time of day – one of the reasons for doing that is to then invite people to write something of their own which draws on, uses as a basis that particular technique that you can find at work in Shakespeare's sonnet."
Jon Cook (*Script 50-54*)

Objective	a) To develop a personal response to a canonical poem b) To use the response as a departure point for writing a text about a personal memory
Organisation	Individual work to start off with, then discussion in groups
Material	A copy of Shakespeare's Sonnet LXXIII or a text of a poem, preferably one which describes an emotional experience
Note	The development (as can be seen from the participant's feedback) can go into a very different direction from the poem that is being studied.

- 1 The students read the text of the poem carefully, perhaps making notes in the margins about their immediate reactions to the individual lines.
- 2 In preparation to writing a text, they focus on someone who means a lot to them (it could also be themselves).
- 3 Then they imagine this person at a time when something is happening or an actual event, which has a high emotional impact on the person or on them as onlookers.
- 4 Then they brainstorm times of day, seasons or times in a person's life that would represent the emotional impact from 3.
- 5 With this they write a text, which could be another poem or perhaps an interior monologue.
- 6 In groups, they discuss the parallels and differences between the poem used for input and their own text.

Variation: Get the students to think of an experience which has produced (or could produce) a strong emotion. Then get them to choose a set of images that would best describe how they feel: a season, a time of day, a part of a human life; perhaps a type of music, a sculpture made from a specific material, a building; perhaps a garden, a tree or landscape. Then they write a text with these images linked to their emotion, preferably without stating explicitly what the emotion is.

Example

Sonnet LXXIII *by William Shakespeare*

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet bird sang.
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west;
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire,
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the deathbed, whereupon it must expire,
Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.
This thou perceiv'st which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well, which thou must leave ere long.

PAINTING A WORD PORTRAIT OF A MEMORY

“The exercise that we did at the end was looking at memory and particularly focussing on a woman who has been important in our lives, maybe a mother or sister, a colleague, teacher – someone who’s had an impact and then to just quietly bring to mind that person, using all your senses, to make the memory clearer and clearer and then to write very freely and try and conjure up the memory in words almost to paint a word portrait of that memory.”

Helen Dunmore (*Script 106-111*)

Objective To bring back an important person from one’s past and to make her (or him) “tangible” to someone else

Group size Irrelevant

Organisation Plenary, frontal, discussion and presentation in groups

Material Lots of little chits of paper

Examples Norman MacCaig’s ‘Aunt Julia’, Jackie Kay’s ‘My Grandmother’, perhaps Theodore Roethke’s ‘Papa’s Waltz’

Notes

- a) For this activity it is important to point out to students that they work on sensuous images that make someone real in one’s imagination without giving endless descriptions. The strategy here should be “show, don’t tell...”
- b) If this exercise is too personal, students should be allowed to use fictitious elements.

- 1 Ask the students to think of a person, preferably a woman, in their past who has had an impact on their life. (It may help if this person is connected with a loss, e.g. a departure, a death, an irreconcilable rift)
- 2 Ask the students to write all the elements and aspects that make this person unique on separate pieces of paper, one feature per piece of paper.
- 3 Now they do the same about sensuous experiences they associate with this person: smell, sight, touch, taste, hearing.
- 4 Then do the same with habits and/or appearances that are somehow ‘larger than life’ in their memory.
- 5 The elements on the various pieces of paper are ordered into a linear progression either by being grouped into thematic units (i.e. combining those elements that are related logically or in your memory) or into a temporal sequence (narrative).
- 6 Use this structure to write a poem or a short prose text (memoir) about that person.
- 7 After the first paragraph or stanza has been written, the students should sit together and present the person as well as what they have already committed to paper by this stage.

Extension: Compare what has been written to a poem or a prose text of a similar theme. (see examples)

Developing the Skills

OLD FOLKS

Objective	To construct an experience either from what one knows or from what could be imagined about someone To use lively imagery and strong episodes to bring the person to life
Organisation	This can be done as individual work or with pieces of paper being passed around on which elements as described in the instructions 1 to 4 can be added one by one. Once all four elements have been added and passed on the students are asked to write a text with the information on the piece of paper they've received.
Material	One largish piece of paper if the activity is started off as group effort
Remark	This activity can be used instead of the one suggested by Helen Dunmore
Example	'Old Men' by Tony Connor (in <i>Strictly Private</i> ed Roger McGough, 1982)

- 1 Get the students to think of an old person (or old persons), either someone they know well or see from time to time. They should give a brief description of the person focussing on a physical feature or features that make the person in question remarkable.
- 2 Ask them to concentrate on something about this person that is striking / unusual / funny / weird / unsettling. This can be an object the person always carries around, a mannerism, a quirk, an obsession.
- 3 Get them to make a note of something this person does habitually and to describe this as graphically as possible. For this they should be encouraged to use similes or metaphors, e.g. to think of their subject as an animal, a plant, a house, a time of day or year, etc.)
- 4 Then they should imagine an event or a period in the person's life that has had a shaping impact on how this person now is.
- 5 Incorporating all or as many of the aspects assembled in steps 1 to 4 they should try to write a text (a short story, a prose vignette, a poem or possibly a monologue).

THREE GENERATIONS

Objective	To use experience and imagination to explore the same issue at different points in family history
Organisation	Individual work
Material	–
Remarks	a) The motto for instruction 5 should be that every word must be made to count. b) Some memories stirred up by this activity can be quite painful. It may therefore be sensible to advise students that the experiences can be fictitious.
Example	‘Woman’s blood’ by Vicki Feaver

- 1 The students should try to imagine themselves as one representative of three generations in a family (which can be theirs): grandparent, parent or child.
- 2 Then they need to think of a feature, an experience, a conflict, that all three generations have to go through.
- 3 They then try to envisage the ways in which these features, experiences, or conflicts change with the times in which they take place for each of the three generations.
- 4 Next they write a text which features the elements developed so far: the three generations, the mutual feature (etc.) and the differences between the ways in which these affect the representatives of the three generations.
- 5 This text is now edited into a short poem or a very concise prose vignette.

HAIKUS

Traditionally Haikus (a kind of Japanese minimal poem) are about an experience with nature and how it relates to what one could refer to as 'the meaning of life'. A haiku has three lines in which the number of syllables is important, five in the first, seven in the second and five again in the third line although at an early stage one may be somewhat lenient with students on exact numbers. Because they are so short they offer an excellent opportunity for editing, i.e. pruning all elements from our expression that are expendable. This can mean words as well as non-essential elements of syntax. Not actually a traditional form is the double haiku, which consists of one haiku presenting an experience, the second relating it to a wider issue.

Instead of haikus, tankas can be used. They are essentially haikus with two seven syllable lines added at the end, which allows more space for expression, but they tend to be more stringent in content: the first two lines should introduce an image in or an experience with nature, the third line is a link relating the experience or image of the first two lines to the 'meaning of life' in the last two lines.

Altogether less restrictive in content and perhaps better suited to the predominantly iambic prosody of English is the cinquain. It starts with a line with two syllables, then one with four, six and eight respectively and finishes off with a two-syllable line. Any of the above can be used to explore the issues raised in the broadcast.

REDUCTIONISM AT PLAY

Objective	a) To reduce an idea to the bare minimum b) To explore language, testing the expendability of syntactic elements or vocabulary
Organisation	Individual work
Material	Cue cards as suggested below, possibly
Note	This activity can be very short and may be useful to round off a session when there is not enough time to do a full-fledged activity.
Examples	'Tenement Haiku' by Marion Lomax/Robyn Bolam, 'Vestibule Hamilton' by Alan Brownjohn.

- 1 Each student picks a card and decides on an experience that would best fit the description on the cue card.
- 2 Then they brainstorm as many ideas about the experience as they can in five minutes
- 3 The next step is to pick out the one that is most intriguing / amusing / unsettling and to write about the experience from that point of view.
- 4 Finally they condense the text into a haiku or a tanka or a cinquain (cf. above).

something that happened to you this morning	something that has always puzzled you
something that you have wanted to say to someone for a long time	an important memory
a thought you would like to pass on	a thought about a borderline experience (e.g. before falling asleep)
a loss	a gain

WRITE A “REAL” HAIKU

- Objective**
- To write a haiku in a way which is fairly close to Japanese tradition
 - To interpret some abstract terms loosely enough so that they can be integrated into a very short text
- Organisation** Individual work
- Material** Two small pieces of paper per student
- Note** This activity can be very short and may be useful to round off a session when there is not enough time to do a full-fledged activity.
- On a small piece of paper every student writes down a term for an abstract concept (beauty, death, life, etc.) These can be rather grand terms, but they can also be quite simple ones (homework, waiting at the bus stop, etc.) The back of the piece of paper is marked with ‘c’ for ‘concept’.
 - On a second piece of paper every student writes down an expression related to time, e.g. seasons, times of day. The back of these pieces of paper are marked ‘t’ for ‘time’.
 - The pieces of paper are collected and redistributed with every student getting a ‘t’ and a ‘c’ piece of paper each.
 - The students write a haiku in which the two terms must occur. These terms can (or perhaps should) be interpreted lightly or humorously.
- Extension:** The same strategy can be applied to tankas or cinquains. Similarly, students can try to write the same idea up as a haiku, a tanka and a cinquain each.

CREATIVE WAYS - PROGRAMME SIX

Presenter: Suzanne Taylor

Produced & written by: Kazimierz Janowski & Carmela DiClemente

BA: Julia Adamson

Recording date: 23.10.00

Kavetsa Adagala Many of us have a tendency to do critical thinking and critical writing and not produce something creative. (*Duration 0'10*)

Presenter Welcome to Creative Ways – a series for teachers and learners of literature inspired by the British Council Conference on the teaching of literature held at Oxford University each year – I'm Suzanne Taylor, and in today's programme we'll hear about two workshop ideas with practical suggestions for moving 'From Critical reading to Creative Writing' – the conference theme.

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10

We've just heard from conference delegate Kavetsa Adagala, who expressed the common feeling among literature teachers that in their classrooms critical or analytical work overshadows any attempts at the creative. How can we change this? Well, Hilary Jenkins, the British Council literature manager, says that a good place to start is by encouraging students to bring their own experiences into the texts they are studying...

15

Hilary Jenkins We should encourage students to see the personal in literature, to make links between their own lives and the literature they're reading and also to make links between themselves and the writers, so they identify not only with the characters in the novels or the plays or the poems but also with why that novel or play or poem was written, how it was produced, the reasons it was produced and what it meant to the writer. (*Duration: 0'25"*)

20

Presenter Jon Cook, senior lecturer at the University of East Anglia believes that creative writing in the literature classroom offers the ideal way of helping students to make that personal link between their own experiences and those of the authors their students are studying...

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Jon Cook The most fruitful thing about using creative writing in a literature degree is to enable people by writing themselves to discover things about the craft of writing, about the role of technique in writing about the way in which writing relates to its immediate context and its immediate culture which I don't think they can discover by simply, for example, attending to theories of discourse or theories of subjectivity. (*Duration: 0'25"*)

30

Presenter He demonstrated the value of creative writing with an exercise based on the famous Shakespeare sonnet 'That time of year thou mayst in me behold'

Sonnet 73 by William Shakespeare

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
when yellow leaves or none or few do hang

upon those boughs which shake against the cold
bare ruined choirs where late the sweet bird sang
In me thou seest the twilight of such day
as after sunset fadeth in the west
40 which by and by black night doth take away
death's second self that seals up all in rest
In me seest the glowing of such fire
that on the ashes of his youth doth lie
as the deathbed whereupon it must expire
45 consumed with that which it was nourished by
This thou perceivest which makes thy love more strong
to love that well which thou must leave ere long.
(Duration: 0'57")

Presenter
50 Jon Cook asked the participants to provide a personal response to the sonnet
by using the technique Shakespeare himself used to write it – this meant
identifying the technique and then letting their imagination do the rest.
Here's Jon Cook with Kavetsa Adagala and Jose Endoenca Martins, two of
the conference delegates, to tell us what happened...

Jon Cook
55 Instead of asking how good or how wise it is – it can actually be used in order
to illustrate a particular way in which the imagination can work.

Now it seems to me that one of the valuable ways in which people nowadays
can gain access to that kind of imaginative technique – in the case of the
Shakespeare sonnet that I was working with this morning, it has to do with
representing the self in terms of a season or in terms of a scene or a time of
60 day – one of the reasons for doing that is to then invite people to write
something of their own which draws on, uses as a basis that particular
technique that you can find at work in Shakespeare's sonnet.
(Duration: 0'45")

Kavetsa Adagala
65 I thought of my father who is ageing now and I wrote about what he is what
he means to the society how his wisdom is there – he's like an old
he-elephant who looks with the eyes of wisdom beyond what is there and
within. So you get this idea of someone who is approaching his sunset but
also is seeing his dawn – the way it is before.
(Duration: 0'31")

Jon Cook
70 It seems to me that once people have done some writing of their own which is
analogous to in this case a sonnet by Shakespeare they can then do a number
of different things. One is that they can go back to the Shakespeare sonnet
and perhaps on the basis of what they've written, see something new about
the way in which that sonnet is written and they can do that not necessarily
75 instead of but certainly in addition to, for example, reading criticism about
Shakespeare, or attending lectures about Shakespeare or engaging in lengthy
discussions about literary interpretation, I'm not suggesting that those things

80 aren't necessary or useful – I think they are but it seems to me that it's very important – especially now – to try and connect what we read in the past to something which is experienced or can be experienced, or a potential experience today.
(Duration 1'00")

Jose Endoenca - Martins
85 What I wrote based on this text was something very interesting – personally because in the morning when I woke up I took a picture of the scene outside my room. The picture was a tree and on the tree was a bird, so I could catch the bird of course in my camera. But the bird of course, the real bird flew. And what I wrote was the idea that the catching of the bird, the freezing of the bird in the camera and the one that flew was part of my reality because I could write that the two birds are me exactly – the one that wants to be free and the one that sometimes needs to be contained by some rules, some responsibilities. In this sense I think that the reading of Shakespeare's sonnet was a good moment for my own expression in written terms. It was very interesting – I like it very very much and this is one thing that I'm going to try to apply in Brazil when I come back, asking the students to read but also asking the students to react in a written way to what they really can apprehend from the text.
90
95 (Duration 0'57")

Presenter
100 You're listening to Creative Ways from the BBC World Service. Today, we're talking about getting students to make the link between their own lives and those of the authors they're studying, through creative writing.

Next we turn to the power of memory as a tool for doing the same thing. Writer Helen Dunmore held a workshop drawing on the writing techniques pioneered by the novelist, Virginia Woolf...

Helen Dunmore
105 My name is Helen Dunmore and I'm a writer who is here attending this conference and I've been holding a workshop just now about using memory in your own writing and relating that to the work of Virginia Woolf.
(Duration 0'13")

Presenter
110 VW is frequently studied through works such as Mrs Dalloway and To the Lighthouse. She developed a technique of writing which involved allowing a continuous flow of ideas and thoughts to drive the novel forward rather than relying on traditional, formal conventions of plot, narrative and character. As we'll hear this technique can also be found in her diaries...

Extract from Virginia Woolf's Diaries:

Thursday the 10th of October, 1940

115 Rather flush of ideas because I've had an idle day a non-writing day, what a relief once in a way, a Vita talking day. About what? Oh, the war, bombs, which house hit, which not, then our books – all very ample, easy and satisfying. She has a hold on life, knows plants and their minds and bodies,
160

120 is large and tolerant and modest with her hands loosely on so many reins,
sons, Harold, garden, farm. Humorous, too, and deeply, I mean awkwardly,
dumbly affectionate. I'm glad that our love has weathered so well.
(*Duration 0'39"*)

Here now is Helen Dunmore's and participant Adina Ciugureanu to tell us
about the workshop.

125 **Helen Dunmore** I began by talking about Virginia Woolf's life as a writer and her
relationships with other creative artists and also her personal relationships,
family and sexual relationships and talking about how we might as writers
learn from aspects of Virginia Woolf's life and apply that perhaps to our own
130 creative lives. The exercise that we did at the end was looking at memory and
particularly focussing on a woman who has been important in our lives,
maybe a mother or sister, a colleague, teacher – someone who's had an
impact and then to just quietly bring to mind that person, using all your
senses, to make the memory clearer and clearer and then to write very freely
and try and conjure up the memory in words almost to paint a word portrait
135 of that memory.

Adina Ciugureanu I wrote about a teacher and actually she is , she used to be because now she's
retired, a teacher in Oxford and I met her seven years ago when I was here
on a scholarship and she really impressed me and helped me with my
research, I was doing my PhD at the time.

140 **Helen Dunmore** And then to discuss it with other people in a small group – what you wrote
about, how you feel about the writing and how far you feel that memory has
been framed in words.

Adina Ciugureanu When we came back we shared the paragraph we wrote with the other
145 people and it was a very interesting experience because that was a very –
not exactly intimate but a very private thing to say. We felt very close to each
other because we all disclosed a little private thing which we wouldn't have
disclosed otherwise.

Helen Dunmore Thinking about how this approach might be used with students – I would say
150 you might be looking at a text – let's go back to Virginia Woolf as I've been
talking about her, and take a novel – say 'To the lighthouse', and to look at
how V.W creates her effect through criticism is one thing but if you were to
ask the students to write about a memory that they might have or a
childhood holiday and a place that was important to them and all the
memories – the sights, the smells, the sounds, the tastes, everything that
155 conjures up for them a childhood summer and then look at their writing and
perhaps think about... discuss those pieces of writing with other people and
then look at what Virginia Woolf has done in creating that summer of her
own and I think there will be an understanding of what the writer has done
that is much deeper, much richer and much really more penetrating than it
was before. (*Duration 2'49"*)

- Presenter** Writer Helen Dunmore talking about the way in which personal memories can be a rich source of ideas for a creative response to a literary text.
- 165 That just about brings us to the end of this programme and indeed to the whole series, but our final thoughts on the value of linking the critical with the creative in the study of literature come from Hilary Jenkins – British Council Literary Manager and Organiser of the Oxford Conference.
- Hilary Jenkins** I think one of the most exciting things for me this week was hearing people say that before coming and discussing these topics with other people, they hadn't realised that they could link the creative with the critical, it was a revelation for them and they were immensely excited by it. On a personal level, too, I think, in that they could maybe write poems themselves which they didn't know. I mean somebody actually said that she had become a poet this week, and she was obviously excited about that but also very, very excited about going back to the classroom and teaching poetry from the point of view of understanding the creative response herself.
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175 *(Duration: 0'38")*
- Ending** In this week's Creative Ways a sonnet by Shakespeare and an extract from Virginia Woolf's Diaries provide the inspiration for creative writing activities in the literature classroom.
- 180
- Sonnet**
That time of year thou mayst in me behold
when yellow leaves or none or few do hang
what I wrote was the idea that the catching of the bird, the freezing of the
bird in the camera, and the one that flew was part of my reality
- 185
- Diary**
Thursday 10th October... bombs
the exercise that we did looking at memory... impact

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A bibliography of Source Texts and Resource Books

The following bibliography is neither complete, canonical nor representative of the *must-have-read-poets* in English. Inclusion is based on three criteria:

- a) appeal to students who may not necessarily be at ease working with poetry
- b) poems and other texts referred to in this pack
- c) useful resource books

Needless to say, they also represent what the author's bookshelves hold.

- | | |
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