

# The YMWA Teachers Pack

The key to a good piece of writing is its ideas.

Too often teachers have given overly structured tasks to their students because of the real time pressures in GCSE. Creative writing tasks are tacked onto the end of literature units, or left up to the pupils to pursue by themselves at home. The new style English GCSEs with controlled assessments mean that pupils no longer can submit multiple drafts to perfect their creative writing. So how can we improve not just our student's writing technique and accuracy, but also their thinking? How can we inspire them so that their ideas are fascinating and engaging? As English teachers, it's time we trusted our students to produce wonderful texts rather than dictating to them what it is they have to write.

This pack sets out a number of ideas that hopefully can help get the creative juices flowing. It gives suggestions for tasks and can be used in its entirety or dipped in and out of. It is suitable for all students from the age of 9 to 89.

It's not a complete creative writing course; it's a collection of useful and fun teaching ideas.

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A note from Young Muslim Writers Awards;

Often writing competitions come with structured themes or topics pupils must write about, the Young Muslim Writers Awards categories however do not. Without a theme or topic in mind teachers often wonder how they can encourage their students to enter the competition and write independently, following this feedback we've put together this teachers pack as an aid to get students writing creatively. We hope you and your students will gain much from this pack and will enter their creative writing pieces for the Young Muslim Writers Awards.

# What is 'Free Writing'?

## Many of the tasks in this pack ask pupils to engage in 'free writing'. So what is it?

In free writing, pupils are asked to write without stopping for a short period of time (normally 60 – 180 seconds). It is essential that pupils DO NOT stop writing during this time period. Some teachers will even ask pupils not to allow the pen to leave the page, so spaces are done with an underscore.

Free writing does not need to be grammatically correct and does not need to use punctuation (although pupils can use it if they want to). It does not need to be a coherent narrative.

Pupils will always be asked to do free writing on a particular topic. This means they should write whatever that comes into their minds about this topic – it does not have to make coherent sense. In the end, it will just be a collection of ideas.

The philosophy behind free writing is that it frees up the creative sides of the students' brains. Within their nonsensical writing there may be the spark of an idea that can be developed into an excellent story, poem or essay.

### Inspire your students!

Take them out for a stroll around the yard. Ask them what if? Play a short video, a sound, or show them a picture. Read them an extract of engaging writing and end it with a good cliff-hanger!

## How is creative writing judged?

*Content requirements and exemplification for GCSE English Language Unit 3 part b: Producing creative texts (creative writing)*

- Candidates must complete two tasks. Each task must be taken from a different column.
- The objective assessed in this part of Unit 3 is:  AO4 Writing
- Write to communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, using and adapting forms and selecting vocabulary appropriate to task and purpose in ways that engage the reader.
- Organise information and ideas into structured and sequenced sentences, paragraphs and whole texts, using a variety of linguistic and structural features to support cohesion and overall coherence.
- Use a range of sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate punctuation and spelling.

*At least one-third of available credit for AO4 should be awarded for the use of a range of sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate punctuation and spelling.*

*The guidance word limit is 1200 words which should be produced under formal supervision in time totalling up to 4 hours. This word limit is guidance only as the written texts should be fit for purpose and should be of a length suitable for the genre. They do not need to be of equal length. The tasks do not have to be completed at the same time.*

# What is 'Free Writing'?

## How to develop 'free writing'

### Then what?

Once your students have completed a piece of free writing, what then? How do we ensure that it is not just thrown away and forgotten?

### Here are some strategies:

- Ask students to find a partner and read each other's work. The partner should write down one positive comment about the free writing (eg. "I liked it when you described the sun as a boiling river"), then write down 2 or 3 questions about the work (eg. "Are you afraid about the sun running out of energy? Why do you want to live on a beach, wouldn't it be uncomfortable?"). Pupils should then swap work and write down answers to the questions their partners asked.

- Organise pupils into small groups (4 or 5) and ask them to read each other their work. Encourage groups to discuss work in a positive way – ie: the student on your right must ask you two questions about what you have written.

- If lesson time is short, ask one or two (stronger) pupils to read their work to the class. Then ask for comments and questions about the work. Lead the class discussion onto how one or two of the ideas could be transformed into a coherent story.

These strategies can also be used when discussing any students' work – not just free writing.

## Here's one we made earlier:

### This is an example of 60 seconds of free writing about 'the sun'.

*Hot boiling river of heat fire burning in hell travel there dr. who almost burned up Martha travel over there to mine for resources in a massive space ship but get into trouble too hot too hot too hot yellow as blood and red inside but is it liquid or gas? I wonder if we'll ever visit the sun or if it will burn out. It will die we will die freeze to death and go cold gold medal for England yeah I want to live on a beach hot sun sun cream smelling of summer salt water crusty salt on the skin.*

It's clear from this piece of 'free writing' the ideas that could be developed into many types of writing.

# Using the senses

## Smell

### **Here's a task that makes use of your sense of smell.**

Bring in something that smells different and interesting. Make sure it's a smell your students have come in contact with before, like cinnamon or Detol, but don't tell them what the smell is.

Make sure it's impossible to tell from the packaging what the smell is (you could use a blindfold, or just cover the bottle) and ask them to smell the substance. The point of the exercise is not to guess the substance correctly, but to let the smell inspire creativity.

Without talking to any of their classmates, ask the students to write one paragraph of free writing. Students should be encouraged to write down anything they think of – it doesn't have to be grammatically correct or even in proper sentences. It can just be a collection of thoughts, or perhaps the beginning of a narrative.

After 90 seconds of writing time, share and discuss your pupils' work.

Pupils can then use the ideas they have come up with as the foundations of a narrative. Perhaps the smell reminded them of a time in hospital, so they can write about somebody in hospital. Perhaps it reminded them of a holiday, so they can write about an experience on a holiday.

Extension task (craft of writing)

Ask your stronger pupils to describe the smell in as much detail as possible. Ask them to use their 'arsenal' of descriptive skills; like metaphors, similes, interesting adjectives etc.

## Touch

### **Many pupils (especially boys) are kinaesthetic learners and it is important to allow pupils to be inspired by this aspect of their learning. Using touch can help give ideas to students for their writing.**

Suggested Tasks:

'Blind-Man's Bluff'

One pupil is blindfolded and is asked to find another pupils in the classroom using touch alone. Other classmates can use 'sound', but no speech.

While the blindfolded student is exploring the room, ask him/her to describe in detail what he feels. This could be tables, chairs, other pupils' clothing and faces (noses?). It's better when this game is not played in uniform, so you may want to get your pupils to dress up in costume before you begin. The blindfolded student should verbalise all his/her thoughts and feelings whilst exploring the room.

Following the game discuss the experience with the entire group. Ask pupils to write about how losing one sense can lead to the heightening of other senses.

# Using the senses

## Sound Track

**Unlike smell, it's better to use a piece of music that pupils are NOT familiar with. Alternatively, you could use a group of sound effects.**

What works really well is using a film's sound (without showing the images). Use the opening credits, when there are often sound effects and music, but no direct speaking. Again, choose a film that your pupils have not seen, so that the images and ideas in their mind are unique and fresh.

Before playing the sound, give pupils 4 'post-it' notes each and ask them to write down the following headings:

1. Place
2. Time
3. Character
4. Plot

While the sounds are playing, ask pupils to write brief ideas under each heading.

When the sound finishes, discuss and share ideas in small groups. These ideas can be a basis for the pupil's own stories in the future. You may want to show them the actual film clip at the end of the lesson, but you may decide this will only cloud your pupils' own creativity.

## Observation of Sound

**Ask your entire class to be absolutely silent for 60 seconds**

While they are silent, ask them to write down every sound they can hear from outside the classroom. This could be a thing like a distant Police siren, talking from another room in the school, birdsong or even footsteps on the pavement outside.

Once the listening time has finished, ask pupils to engage in free writing about ONE thing they heard. For example, if they choose the Police siren, ask them to write freely about that for 90 seconds. Once finished, discuss their ideas with the class and talk about how you could develop this into a story.

# Using the senses

## Lucky-Dip

**This is another Kinesthetic exercise**

Put an obscure object into a bag and ask pupils to feel it. It's better if the object is not easily recognisable – even better if the pupils don't know what it is even if they see it.

Ask the pupils to engage in 90 second of silent free writing after touching the object. Pupils should write about any ideas that spring to mind.

Discuss the ideas with the rest of the class. Perhaps one of their ideas will be the start of a brilliant story.

## Using Pictures

**Using interesting pictures to stimulate writing is an effective way of motivating pupils to write.**

- Ask pupils to engage in 'free writing' about a picture.
- Ask them to imagine they were in the place and describe what they can see/hear/smell/touch around them.
- Ask pupils to construct a 100 word story (with a clear beginning/middle/end) based on the picture.
- Ask pupils to describe the OPPOSITE of what they were seeing in the picture.

Choose pictures that are obscure or emotive. Often, the basic Microsoft Windows pictures can be used for these tasks. Try to choose pictures that do not tell an obvious story. Also, try not to choose pictures of stereotypical sights the pupils are familiar with (eg. Big Ben, World Trade Centre etc.)



# Writing Games

These can be used to compliment lessons you have already planned or ...

Making writing a fun part of a lesson, rather than just an 'assessment' at the end of a lesson, is an important aspect of inspiring pupils. Teachers can do this by playing writing games in the class, as well as kinaesthetic activities. The aim is not to create beautiful writing, but to make the process funny, entertaining and stimulating.

## A Class Writing a Story

Pass a piece of paper around the classroom. Each pupil adds a sentence to a story without being able to see the previous sentence (the paper can be folded or covered with card). Read the final story to the class.



## B Word Mixup

Give pupils 10 unrelated words (you could use spelling words for the week). Ask them to write a story that makes sense in as little time as possible.



## C Creating a Potion

Write a recipe for a potion. Decide what you want the potion to do. It could be a love potion, or you could make it more comic – like a potion to cure bad breath.



## D Dead Metaphors

Introduce pupils to the idea of cliché and dead metaphors. Give them a list of dead metaphors, discuss them, clarify their meaning, and ask them to write new metaphors (or similes) for each concept.

A heart of stone  
Apple of my eye  
Steer clear  
Bear fruit  
Hatch a plan  
Difficult to swallow



Read on for more ideas

# Writing Games

## Don't Forget - Drama and Movement

Many students work better when kinaesthetic techniques and teaching styles are used in the classroom. There are many ways to do this that can inspire writing and ideas for stories.

### **E**Disasters

Come up with a number of comic disasters for a super hero. It could be simple things like 'I'm late for school – help, Spiderman!'. Or, 'I've forgotten my PE kit, save me, Batman!'. Pupils should write a short story about the scenario (no longer than 100 words).



### **F**Charades

Ask pupils to act out the titles of famous stories, films, etc. The audience is then asked to guess what the title is.



### **G**What are you Doing?

A student acts out a simple action (like brushing teeth). The next student in line asks, "What are you doing?" The original student answers with an action that is different to what they are doing. The next student (who asked the question) acts out the action he was told, and so on.



Read on for more ideas

# Writing Games

## **I** Mirroring & Freeze Frame

Ask pupils to face each other and simply mirror actions. An extra innovation to this activity is to read a pupil's story and ask pupils to freeze in different poses that relate to what they are hearing (continuing with mirroring each other's actions).

While reading a pupil's story, ask a small group of students to create 3 freezes that depict action in the story and/or character relationships..



## **J** Soundscape

As a class using their bodies and anything else in the room, ask pupils to 'set the scene' for a story using sound. This activity works brilliantly with the opening scene of Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'. Pupils enjoy creating the sounds of the storm together. However, it's nice to use the activity with their own stories and writing.



## **F** Creating a Play

Obviously the ultimate use of drama is to turn a student's story into a play. However, a good activity is to reverse this process. When pupils come up with a good idea for a story, ask them first to create a short drama acting out what would be good in the story.



## **H** Chinese Whispers

Start by whispering a short phrase into the first pupil's ear. Ask each pupil to repeat the phrase around the room then discover what the phrase has become by the time it reaches the last pupil.



# The Importance of Reading

As every teacher knows, the key to good writing can be found in reading.

**So any encouragement of creative writing should be matched with the same amount of motivation for reading.**

Remember:

1. It's always harder to get boys to read than girls. Even boys who are good at reading, and enjoy it once they get started, are difficult to get started on a book.
2. Role modelling is very important when encouraging reading. When older students and even teachers are reading and talking about books it motivates everyone!



3. Reading clubs are great! Organise a reading club based around one of the big children's book awards (like the Carnegie). These competitions often have brilliant websites and areas for children to write reviews and 'blog' about the books they have read.
4. Don't be afraid of different genres. Get your students to read whatever they want. If the boys like motorcycles – get them a motorcycle magazine. Any reading teaches pupils structures, paragraphing, punctuation and correct spelling.
5. Read to your pupils. Enjoy reading a whole novel, over time, in class. Often, students need to be taught the benefit of 'getting through the boring bits'; they need to learn the benefits of perseverance. Reading to them can help them over the hump and appreciate getting to the end of a book.

# Openings to stories

Choose a number of novels (at least 5) and read the first paragraph.

It's best if the students have not read the book before. Discuss with the pupils HOW the author grabs their attention. Get pupils to continue the story. More advanced pupils should be asked to try to copy the 'style' of the author. Concentrate on the genre of the writing, and see if your pupils can mimic the tone. Over time, older pupils should be encouraged to develop their own style and unique tone.

*Mr. And Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense.*

*-Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone: J. K. Rowling*

If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them. They're quite touchy about anything like that, especially my father. They're *nice* and all -I'm not saying that- but they're touchy as hell. Besides, I'm not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography or anything. I'll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas just before I got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy. I mean that's all I told D.B. about, and he's my *brother* and all. He's in Hollywood. That isn't too far from this crummy place, and he comes over and visits me practically every week end.

*-The Catcher in the Rye: J. D. Salinger*

# Openings to stories

It was a dark and stormy night; the rain fell in torrents, except at occasional intervals, when it was checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets (for it is in London that our scene lies), rattling along the house-tops, and fiercely agitating the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness. Through one of the obscurest quarters of London, and among haunts little loved by the gentlemen of the police, a man, evidently of the lowest orders, was wending his solitary way.

Paul Clifford: Edward George Bulwer-Lytton

*YOU don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer; but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly, or the widow or maybe Mary. Aunt Polly -Tom's Aunt Polly, she is -and Mary, and the Widow Douglas is all told about in that book, which is mostly a true book, with some stretches, as I said before.*

-The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: Mart Twain