



Writing in Education

Issue 91
Spring 2024

Learning from teaching

National Association of Writers in Education



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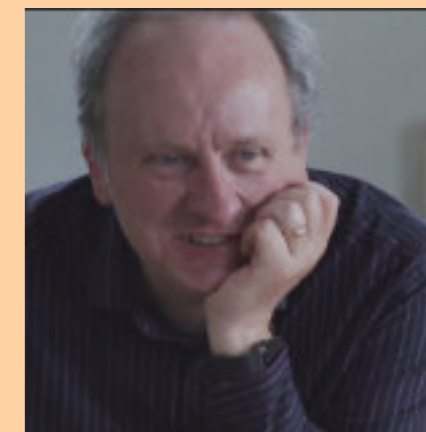


Welcome to issue 91

As a long-time NAWE member before I became editor, I've known full well that the association is a broad church. There are tenured university lecturers in NAWE, there are individual storytellers running workshops worldwide, there are NAWE writers in every conceivable corner of education.

It's not as if that's surprising. You know how writing is a powerful teaching tool and you know how even aside from the students we work with, our own writing ability is an extraordinary boon in progressing our careers.

What I don't think I properly appreciated until this issue, though, is how much and how directly this broad church informs and helps all of its members. This issue's cover image, for instance, is by Cat Weatherill and she took it to illustrate her article on [page 15](#) about a single family workshop -- but the lessons I took from that changed how I did a more formal online lecture. The lessons I think you will take from that piece and all of this issue's articles will make you look at your work in a new way too.



They may even change how and where you write, they may contribute to your finding new places to communicate. Chip Colquhoun's article on being a storyteller ([page 45](#)) will make you want to try performing your writing, for instance, or at the very least make you want to see him in action.

Or if you are looking for somewhere that you can have a brilliant time with passionate writers, on [page 25](#), Emma Boniwell wants you to volunteer with young writers' groups.

Writing ultimately has to be a solitary occupation if you're to get anything written, but it doesn't have to be solitary all the time. NAWE writers are all teaching writing, but we're doing it in so many different ways, so many different places, and for so many different audiences, that I think we are also constantly learning from teaching.

William Gallagher, editor

JOIN NAWE

the only UK wide organization supporting the development of creative writing in all educational and community settings.

Join your fellow writers and educators to get:

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3 issues of Writing in Education

Regional gatherings and the NAWE Conference

Career advice and resources

Professional Directory

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Learning from Teaching
Cover photo by Cat Weatherill

Interested in contributing?

We invite NAWE members to write on the subject of creative writing in education - in schools, universities, adult education and community settings. We encourage you to think broadly on this topic and address any issue relating to the development of a space for creative writing in the education system, in care homes, libraries or wherever you are using writing in your work. Please note, it is developmental work that we wish to highlight, not self-promotion. It may be useful to think about the kinds of articles most useful to your teaching and practice.

Submission deadlines:

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For submission guidelines please refer to:

www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/nawe-magazine/submissions.html

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News

NAWE CONFERENCE 2024: WRITING TO CONNECT
Online, 09:00-17:00 Friday/Saturday November 8/9 2024

The NAWE Conference is an opportunity for NAWE Members and others to share their various approaches to creative writing and its teaching and facilitation at all levels and in all settings. You are invited to submit proposals for presentations (including academic papers), discussions/seminars or workshops. [More details online](#)

NEW CEO FOR THE SOCIETY OF AUTHORS

Anna Ganley is to take over the Society of Authors as Chief Executive when Nicola Solomon retires in April. See the *Writing in Education* interview with Ganley on [page 11](#) for details of her plans and of what the Society can do for authors and writers.

The Society of Authors has also elected Vanessa Fox O'Loughlin to become its new Chair.

NAWE MEMBER'S NEW NOVEL

Michael W. Thomas's *The Erkeley Shadows* is now available. '1967. The Summer of Love. Not for Jonathan Parry, perhaps, but certainly a time of big change. Soon his family will emigrate to Canada. But he, at least, won't be leaving the old country wholly behind. In his heart he carries a dreadful secret, and its consequences track him like an implacable assassin from teenage to manhood, from the Canadian Prairies to the Maritime Provinces and back.'

[Buy *The Erkeley Shadows* by Michael W. Thomas.](#)
Paperback: £10. Kindle: £5.

FREAKONOMICS ON FRAUD IN ACADEMIA

You know that fraudulent research is bad, clearly, but what you may not know is how shockingly prevalent it is – and how there can be a cost to it, sometimes even a cost in human lives.

The *Freakonomics* podcast has examined the extent, the causes, and the damage of academic fraud in a compelling pair of episodes, starting with *Why is There So Much Fraud in Academia?* It says that last year around 10,000 research papers were retracted because of fraud – and in news to just make your heart sink, there is even evidence to suggest that Ptolemy faked his data all the way back in 170AD.

[Listen to the first episode online.](#)

Acting Co-Chair's Report

With my fellow Trustee, Derek Neale, I've now been Acting Co-Chair for a year. It has been an interesting time, and I'm pleased to say that NAWE is fully functioning and providing vital services to all writers working in the teaching of creative writing. One of the increasingly popular aspects of our work is giving writers a chance to get together. For the last few years this has been online, and although we would all love to meet in-person, online is a very efficient way of communicating.

Some of you will have been to our quarterly Members Get-Together (the next is on Wednesday 13th March 2024, 18:00 - 19:00 GMT) and these are proving a very good way of getting to know each other. We have just started a Zoom gathering for Members from Ireland, Scotland and Wales, which will allow Members to share work with a focus beyond England - a good thing, too!

Most importantly, our NAWE Conference (title: *Writing to Connect*) will return on Friday 8th and Saturday 9th November 2024. This will again be online - the costs and risks of doing it in person are simply too great at the moment - and of course that means that engaging is extremely easy. Our delegate rates are mostly lower than in previous years, especially for student members who we are particularly keen to attract, and we know that the range of talks, presentations and workshops will be wonderful.

The involvement of NAWE Members in the NAWE Conference is, therefore, absolutely vital. Using Submittable we are now open for proposals with the deadline being Friday 31st May 2024. Whether you are a seasoned facilitator of writing workshops in community settings, a researcher of the pedagogy of creative writing or the creative process or any point in between, we would be delighted to have your ideas for being involved.

But what of meeting in-person? Well, as a new initiative, in the ten days prior to the 2024 NAWE Conference we will be inviting Members to organise their own gatherings across the UK. If you would like to spend an hour or two with some NAWE Members from your neck of the woods, and you have access to a kettle, a packet of biscuits and a place to meet, you have all that is required to make this happen. We'll be sharing more details in future Newsletters, or feel free to drop a line to admin@nawe.co.uk and we can get back to you.

Whether it is online or in-person, I look forward to seeing you at some point in the coming year.

Jonathan Davidson

Acting Co-Chair, NAWE

HE Committee Report

The PhD network is expanding its reach under the leadership of Elena Traina and Ruth Moore. In 2024 they plan to revive the PhD Network through online meet-ups, opportunities to connect regionally with NAWE members, and bespoke sessions at the 2024 NAWE conference. If you are a Creative Writing PhD student who would like to connect with others in the UK, please get in touch to express your interest. MA students considering a PhD are also welcome.

You can:

- Email Elena and Ruth to register interest in our first online NAWE PhD forum of 2024 (open to all - Ruth Moore (University of Exeter) rm882@exeter.ac.uk; Elena Traina (Falmouth University) ET279502@falmouth.ac.uk)

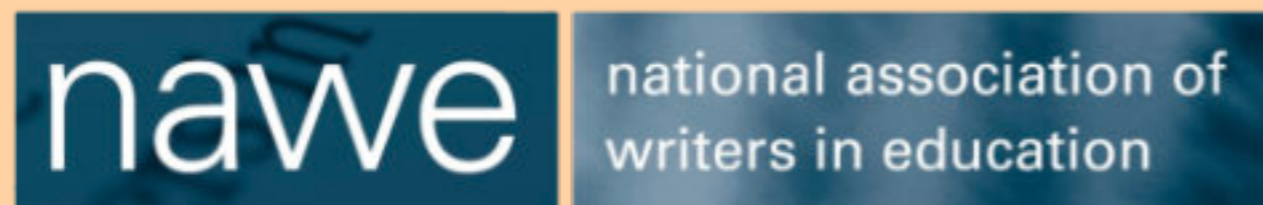
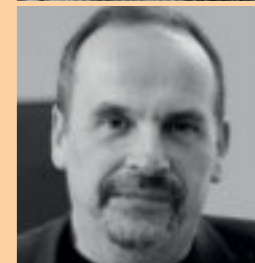
- Join the [NAWE PhD Creative Writing network](#) on Facebook

The new *Creative Writing Subject Benchmark* statement is in the final stages of editing. Many members of the HE Committee served on the QAA committee.

We are very grateful for all your feedback on the draft document.

The HE Committee has continued to have robust discussions around accessibility and diversity in Creative Writing. We are planning a special edition of *Writing in Practice* looking at Accessibility, Equality and Diversity.

Jennifer Young



AWP Report (US)



The [Association of Writers & Writing Programs](#) (AWP) is coming to Kansas City, Missouri! The annual *AWP Conference & Bookfair* (#AWP24) will take place February 7–10, 2024 and will feature 375 events by and for creative writers, as well as over 500 publishers, universities, and other

exhibitors. Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Jericho Brown will give the keynote address on Thursday, February 8.

We are thrilled to host writers from the Midwest and beyond in 2024. One goal of the upcoming conference is to foster connection and to support writing communities who live and work in Missouri, where gender expression, gender identity, and gender-affirming-care are under attack, abortion access is banned, and attempts to defund the public library system are a reality. AWP is working to support LGBTQIA+ and women's communities in Kansas City and maintains a #AWP24 Resources & Updates webpage.

These communities are showing up for #AWP24! A sampling of accepted events include:

Beyond Gay and Bi: Creating Diversity in Queer Characters
How to Be Your Own Agent
Ethics of Writing the Other: #ownvoices in Literary Writing
Be Gay, Do Crime: Teaching Queer and Trans Poetics in Dangerous Times
Writing Miscarriage, Child Loss, and Complicated Childbirth in the Post-Roe Era

AWP is also honored to partner with Pride Haven, a Kansas City-based overnight shelter for transition-aged LGBTQIA+ youth for our #AWP24 #WritersServe project. Attendees can support Pride Haven's mission by donating items from their wish list, including necessities (which can be purchased online) and books (which can be purchased online or on-site at the conference).

Pride Haven representatives will staff their table at the entrance to the bookfair, where attendees can stop by to learn more about how to support this important work.

AWP is partnering with the Kansas City Public Library to host its kickoff event on Wednesday, February 7 from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. CT (with doors opening at 5:30 p.m.). The event will begin with the announcement of the winners for AWP's various literary awards, including the Intro Journals Project, the National Program Directors' Prize, the Small Press Publisher Award, and the George Garrett Award for Outstanding Community Service in Literature.

Following the presentation of awards will be an incredible discussion titled 'Poetry as Reciprocity: Indigenous Nations Poets Celebrate Language Back.'

This reading and discussion will feature Indigenous writers Kimberly Blaeser, Heid E. Erdrich, Jake Skeets, and Elise Paschen. All featured events will be held in-person and livestreamed to virtual attendees.

Whether you'll be attending in person or virtually, we can't wait to see you at #AWP24!

Rachel Balzano,
Communications Manager

AAWP Report (Australasia)

Dear NAWE readers.

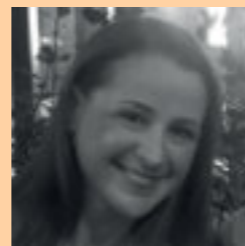
My name is Julia Prendergast. It is my privilege and pleasure to serve the [Australasian Association of Writing Programs](#) (AAWP) as the current President/Chair. I oversee the Prizes and Partnerships portfolio. I am inordinately passionate about this portfolio, not only because of the opportunities we provide for writers and translators, but also for the partnerships we have forged with publishers and writing communities in Australasia, and beyond. I am supported in managing the activities of this portfolio by the AAWP executive body, broadly, but in particular by the prizes team: Dr Katrina Finlayson, Dr Daniel Juckes, Dr Ben Stubbs, and Professor Jen Webb.

This portfolio abounds in positive energy generated by outreach and engagement. We provide publication pathways and networking avenues for writers and translators, with a particular focus on facilitating opportunities for emerging writers and under-

represented voices. I take this opportunity to share our 2024 suite of prizes.

AAWP/Spineless Wonders Novella Prize

This prize is offered in partnership with the Spineless Wonders | Short Australian Stories (SW). It is offered for the very first time in 2024. The prize is aimed at emerging writers. It is open to authors who have written a novella, in traditional form, or a hybrid work, crossing genre boundaries, including verse novels and linked stories. The winner receives a \$500 cash prize, and fully-subsidised fees to attend the AAWP's annual conference (held in November, each year). The AAWP judge's report is sent to SW, together with the winner's manuscript, and SW agree to assess the manuscript as a matter of priority. Entries should not exceed 5000 words.



AAWP / UWRF Prize for Emerging Writers

This prize is offered in partnership with Ubud Writers and Readers Festival (UWRF). The prize is open to emerging writers of prose and poetry. The prize includes a ticket to UWRF, and accommodation for the duration of the festival. The winner receives a one-year membership to the AAWP, and fully-subsidised conference fees to attend our annual conference. The winning entry will be considered for publication in *Meniscus Literary Journal* / *ACE Anthology* (Recent Work Press). Entries should not exceed 30 lines (poetry) or 3000 words (prose).

AAWP/UWRF Translators' Prize

This prize is offered in partnership with Ubud Writers and Readers Festival (UWRF). The prize is open to translators at any stage of their career. The winner receives a ticket to UWRF, and accommodation for the duration of the festival. In addition, the winner receives a one-year membership to the AAWP, and fully-subsidised conference fees to attend our annual conference. The winning entry will be considered for publication in *Meniscus Literary Journal*.

Entries must be no more than 30 lines (poetry) or 3000 words (prose). Entrants can translate their own work or the work of others, into English. Entries must be accompanied by a 'Translator's Statement of Intention' (up to 400 words).

The aim of this prize is to promote the work of under-represented writers to a broader "English-using" audience – to celebrate the art of translation by building both local and global writing communities from within our broad geographical region.

Hybrid storytelling is broadly conceived as storytelling that crosses traditional boundaries of non-fiction and creative non-fiction and/or is experimental in form. The winner will receive a \$500 cash prize, a one-year subscription to *Westerly*,

Chapter One Prize

This was the very first prize we established. This opportunity is offered in partnership with the University of Western Australia Publishing (UWAP). The prize is aimed at emerging writers.

It is open to authors who have written a literary novel, a poetry collection, a short story collection, or a hybrid work, crossing genre boundaries.

The winner receives a \$500 cash prize, and fully-subsidised fees to attend the AAWP's annual conference (held in November, each year). The AAWP judge's report is sent to UWAP, together with the winner's manuscript, and UWAP agree to assess the manuscript as a matter of priority. Entries should not exceed 50 lines (poetry) or 5000 words (prose).

Full details of all of our prizes are available at: <https://www.aawp.org.au/news/opportunities/>

The AAWP community wishes our NAWE friends good health and positive energy. We warmly welcome submissions to our suite of prizes from the NAWE community.

Julia Prendergast.



CHAPTER ONE
The AAWP's Publication Pathway for Emerging Writers

Have you written a poetry collection, literary novel, short story collection, or a hybrid work that crosses genre boundaries? Enter the Australasian Association of Writing Programs' (AAWP) 'Chapter One' competition for your chance to win.

If you win, your work will be assessed by the University of Western Australia Publishing, as a matter of priority. You will effectively leap to the top of the submission pile. You will also receive a \$500 cash prize and fully subsidised conference fees to attend the annual conference of the AAWP (November 2024) where you will read from your work.

If your full manuscript is as robust as 'Chapter One' you may secure a publishing contract with UWAP: <http://uwap.uwa.edu.au>
Take advantage of this stunning opportunity. Fast track your writing journey in a fiercely competitive market.

Entries close 30 June 2024
Enter via: <https://meniscusliteraryjournal.submittable.com/submit>
Terms and Conditions: aawp.org.au/news/opportunities

 
Australasian Association of Writing Programs

European Association of Creative Writing Programmes

The deadline for this Call for Papers is 15th February 2024. You can submit your proposal through the form at the bottom of this page. To download and view this Call for Papers as a PDF, [click here](#).

An anthology of contemporary European short stories accompanied by critical commentaries and creative prompts by tutors of Creative Writing from all over Europe, serving as an indispensable resource for writers, students, and tutors seeking to enhance their creative and teaching practice

The repertoire of stories that can be used to teach (or to teach oneself) creative writing is virtually infinite. A tutor of fiction, for example, could choose from national authors to literature in translation, from nineteenth-century English novels to short stories published in international literary magazines last year or last month. Nonetheless, exemplary literature has traditionally not reflected the diversity of a global (or not even national) literary production.

With Writing Europe, we aim to design an anthological handbook reflecting the diversity that defines both European contemporary fiction and creative writing pedagogy. This volume seeks contributions from creative writing tutors from all over Europe, who are invited to:

- choose a recent short story (originally published within the last fifteen years) in their native language, or the language they teach Creative Writing in;
- and write a critical commentary highlighting aspects of craft, style/language, and culture that they think would be useful in the teaching of it.

With our emphasis on 'place', we aim to contextualise these short stories, allowing the reader-writer to understand where a specific piece of writing "comes from" in all possible senses.

In line with the volume's hands-on approach, we also

ask contributors to include in their chapter a list of creative prompts to inspire the reader-writer to generate new material based on what they have read.

The objectives of this volume are:

- to isolate narrative and stylistic techniques that reader-writers can apply in their own writing and to provide other tutors with case studies they can use in class;
- to showcase brand-new regional literature and literature in translation rarely encountered in creative writing syllabi;
- to inspire reader-writers to generate new material based on creative prompts;
- to provoke considerations on the nature of the short story as a literary form and on its relevance now;
- to discuss how writers approach specific themes and how these define European creative writing;
- to reflect on the universality of craft and the role and impact of place, language and culture on writing;
- to explore the 'local', the 'global and the 'universal' of contemporary short fiction writing.

A recommended chapter outline includes:

- 1) A brief introduction to the short story
- 2) A recent short story originally written in the language in which creative writing is taught** (2000-4000 words)
- 3) A critical commentary (2000-3000 words), which may include:

- Context (where and how the story is taught)

- Craft (e.g. character, POV and narrator, setting, structure, etc.)

- Style (e.g. voice and tone, stylistic devices...)

- Theme

- Language and culture

4) 3-5 writing prompts based on one or more aspects of the short story.

***For the volume, funding will be sought to translate contemporary fiction into English. Please provide as much information about the short story as possible (publisher details, publication year, and author contact details if you have them).*

If you choose to analyse a short story already available in English translation, please include the translator's name, the publisher and the year of the translation. Critical commentaries have to be written in English. We aim to secure extra funding to provide linguistic support to make sure that L2 contributors are adequately supported and that each contribution complies with the publisher's standards.

The production of this volume is supported by

- Bloomsbury Academic, a specialised division of Bloomsbury, a leading independent publishing house based in the UK. Subject to successful internal and peer review, the volume will be submitted to their Research in Creative Writing

- The European Association of Creative Writing Programmes, whose board will be involved in ensuring that the selected abstracts represent a sufficiently diverse range of institutions (universities, private schools, foundations, academies, etc.), countries, languages, approaches and creative works.

The National Centre for Writing, whose team will match the selected short stories with literary translators and promote the volume within its extensive network of creative writing tutors.

How to submit your abstract:

Please submit an abstract using the form at the bottom of this page.

In your abstract, briefly summarise the short story (please clearly state author, language, publisher and year of publication; if applicable, all information about its translation, too) and outline the aspects that you would like to include in your critical commentary. Please include one example of a creative writing prompt you would propose in relation to your short story and commentary in the dedicated field.

Deadline for abstracts: 15th February 2024

All selected contributors will be contacted informally by the end of June 2024. Official letters of acceptance with the deadline for full chapters will be released only after funding has been secured (exp. autumn 2024/winter 2025).

For any enquiries, please email Elena Traina or Dr Adrian Markle at writingeurope2023@gmail.com.

Lapidus



Val Watson (Lapidus chair)

Learning from 'falling'

Crossing a busy city road recently I tripped and fell. The thing about falling flat on your face as I did is it comes fast and without warning, there's little time to prevent it happening.

Shock, embarrassment, injury, and pain were experienced in quick succession. Falling, in childhood, adolescence and early adulthood is 'normal', acceptable even; falling in in the latter half of your life carries risk of serious damage or is a sign a health crisis.

Resilience lowered, jumping up, bouncing back, standing up, can be more complex when older.

I had done the unthinkable, tripping myself up, lost control, concentration, direction and balance. This was not part of my plan. It was not adult or surefooted.

It was momentary inattention, carelessness even. It was shocking to me and those around me.. My body was bruised and hurting in places I had been previously complacent about. I did not want to fall again.

I was surprised by my cautious movements once upright, questioning my spatial awareness. And yet, it made sense.

I wanted to return to the time before falling when I was more confident, pain free 'care free' even. This place of hindsight is often where we travel as writers exploring our wellbeing whilst living through the painful and illuminating healing process.

This contrasted with the 'falling' experience I had the next day, viewing art works in a gallery. I realised how, without warning, I 'fell' into some works of art more than others, the falling was sudden, the messages received stimulated a mixture visceral



responses, went in deep and spoke to my lived experiencing, past and present, of being in the world. Moving my eyes, head and body in various ways to best see the paintings and sculptures I wondered what the artists felt as they worked, and what response they wanted to their work if any. Willingly, briefly, I fell into their world, Taking time, paying attention, reflecting I made sense of falling and could see a way towards healing. I had fallen, was now upright and had survived.

Val Watson (Chair)

About Lapidus International

Lapidus is an International expressive arts community that believes in the power of the written and spoken word offering benefits to wellbeing and professional development. Lapidus supports its members by creating opportunities to connect, develop and share our work and experiences.

Lapidus Research (LIRIC and LLRC)

Lapidus International Research and Innovation Community (LIRIC) is a strong community of writers with an interest in research, supporting the work of experienced and new researchers in the field of writing for wellbeing. LIRIC produces a peer-reviewed journal and hosts a monthly online discussion/seminar forum Lapidus Living Research Community (LLRC) for Lapidus members to meet, share ideas and learn from each other.

Latest News at Lapidus International

Monthly events

Please see the [Lapidus website](#) for information with news about our events.

Make the most of your NAWE

You'll know about our advocacy work for Creative Writing, and, at the individual level, how we provide public liability insurance cover if you're a professional member, but are you aware of all the other ways we can support you and your work?

For instance, we can help spread the word about any workshops or competitions you're running (or any jobs you're recruiting for if you're an organisation) through our weekly e-bulletin *The Writer's Compass* and our website listings.

We give priority to including member listings. All we ask is that it has a professional development element. You can find submissions guidance [online here](#).

We also try, if space permits, to give a mention to any special news you may have of interest to members that falls outside our listing categories within the feature part of the bulletin.

nawe

nawe

Our Information Manager Philippa Johnston pjohnston@nawe.co.uk is the person to contact about anything relating to the bulletin or website. She's also very happy to share member news via social media.

Do contact our Reviews Manager, Matthew Tett (reviews@nawe.co.uk) if you have a new book coming out that you think would be of interest to your fellow members. You'll find details of submission windows online here.

Finally, we have a Professional Directory on the website which lists professional members who are available for projects, author visits and other events.

This acts as a valuable resource for organisations looking to work with a creative writer so it's worth revisiting your entry every now and again to check that it's up to date. You can manage your own entry online.

If you have any problems doing this, our Membership Coordinator Katie Worman will be happy to help. Contact her on 0330 3335 909 / admin@nawe.co.uk

We look forward to hearing from you!

Writing in Education Interview: Anna Ganley, Society of Authors



WILLIAM GALLAGHER talks with ANNA GANLEY as she prepares to take over as Chief Executive Officer of the Society of Authors.

When you will be in post as CEO?

Officially I take over as Chief Executive at the beginning of April, so the next few months we'll be working on the transition from Nicola Soloman to myself, made easier by the fact we've had a great working relationship these last 12 years.

Am I right that you have worked at every single level of Society of Authors? That must give you a great perspective.

Pretty much! I started as temporary Receptionist as a maternity cover and I've worked in most departments, and set up a few new departments, too.

From office management and events, through to being part of our advisory team, working as our website and social media manager, setting up our Comms team and heading up our Operations team covering HR and working with our board and Fellows.

While I'm sure you can't detail any plans, are there issues that you and the outgoing CEO see as vital to the future?

An issue that will continue to dominate the year ahead is of course generative AI, which is especially important to the educational sector where AI is a substantial threat.

We'll continue to press for transparency, credit, control and compensation for our members and to keep them informed about the opportunities and risks of new technologies.

With a General Election on the horizon, we'll be publishing our asks of the political parties with a focus on intellectual property (IP), fair terms for creators and a better tax, benefits and legislative

landscape for freelance workers.

Of course, sustainability will remain a top priority: if we don't deal with the climate crisis, then nothing else will matter. We'll continue to work together in the Sustainability Industry Forum and to help authors talk to their publishers about the sustainability of their books with our Tree to Me campaign. We are also launching a Sustainability Network for our members in February, chaired by Piers Torday.

We'll continue to raise questions about Amazon, Spotify and streaming practices, to ensure authors receive a fair share of the revenues from newer and non-traditional delivery methods. And we'll still be campaigning for an Anti-SLAPP law.

We are currently co-claimants in the Judicial Review relating to Oak National Academy. We are opposed to the government's decision to convert Oak National Academy into an Arm's Length Body to the Department of Education.

The proposal allows for one set of state approved resources which threaten diversity and choice; by removing financial incentive, it would damage the healthy competition which is at the heart of educational publishing.

The result will likely be greater challenges to teachers, harm to student grades and a weaker pool of resources. We are calling on the government to reconsider this untimely decision, which promises only to distract from – or worse, to contribute to – the very real problems in education.

a watching brief for academic writers

Of interest to academic writers, we'll be keeping a watching brief on how Open Access for books, as well as journal articles, is impacting on writers, notably

those caught in the 'publish or perish' loop in order to succeed in their academic careers.

For creative writing tutors, teachers and lecturers, we continue to be concerned about the 'Uberisation' of teaching contracts with zero hours contracts. We work with members who are subject to these precarious working conditions.

The issue here is that they should be considered employees but their misclassification means they miss out on fundamental workplace rights.

And neither are they treated as freelancers as they aren't being paid the rates or afforded the freedoms commensurate with those of 'real freelancers' (e.g. 'contract for services' or 'consultant' roles etc).

And we'll continue lobbying and campaigning for a fair, inclusive and diverse publishing industry.

Last year we were delighted to be on the team drafting the Industry Professional Values Document and we hope to see that widely used.

Why should writers in education join the Society of Authors?

Writers of content for all educational settings should consider joining the Society of Authors.

We offer unlimited advice and the vetting of individual author contracts from the SoA advisory team.

We provide information on rates and fees and give a broad range of practical advice, on topics such as copyright and chasing payments.

We have a large number of educational and academic writers and they mainly join for this specialist advice, information, professional community and networking with writers in the sector, many of whom are being squeezed financially by publishers.

Professional community

Members are represented by our Educational Writers Group (EWG), set up back in 1964 to protect the interests of educational authors in professional matters, especially in relation to contracts, rates of pay, digitisation and copyright.

This year the Educational Writers Group has a new committee (following a quiet spell post-pandemic) and the group proudly turns 60 in 2024. They'll be celebrating this milestone with online and in-person events.

Rhona Snelling, freelance ELT author, speaker, project manager, and editor, is the current Chair of the Educational Writers Group, which is run by a volunteer committee of educational writers working across the sector.

Rhona thinks writers in education should join the SoA for the 'incredible support'- the contract vetting service to protect your rights, both present and future (from Rhona's experience, this has helped her to negotiate the removal of non-compete clauses and other non-advantageous terms).

Campaigning

The group helps to keep members informed about developments in education, curriculum, ELT, digital media and government policy and we lobby for adequate funding for books in schools, colleges and libraries, and for well-stocked public libraries and professionally-staffed libraries in all educational institutions.

We also encourage publishers in all media to respect the highest professional standards in educational writing and we enable educational writers to network and socialise in congenial surroundings.

Members keep in touch via their active Facebook discussion group where they can ask questions, share news, etc., with recent threads including the titles authors have been working on, ideas for secondary fiction, and publisher/editor recommendations.



Celebrating Outstanding Examples of Educational Writing

The Society of Authors administers the ALCS Educational Writer's Award which celebrates outstanding examples of traditionally-published non-fiction that stimulates and enhances learning.

It's the UK's only award for educational writing that inspires creativity, encourages students to read widely and builds up their understanding of a subject beyond the requirements of exam specifications.

And the shortlist for the 2023 prize has just been announced. The winner will be announced on 22 February.

Celebrating Editorial Best Practice

The author-editor relationship is fundamental to a work's success – and no more so than in educational writing, where so much depends on clear briefs, workable schedules and constructive feedback.

Our Educational Writers Group has worked in partnership with key educational publishers to set out our Author-Publisher Guidelines, which aim to help guide the author-editor relationship.

In addition to outlining our expectations for best practice, we also recognise those editors who have shown excellence in the way they have collaborated with their authors with our EWG Award for Editorial Best Practice.

Do you need to already be a published author?

Not at all. We have two categories of members: Associate and Full Member. So, as an Associate, emerging writers working towards a professional career as an author can join the SoA.

If an educational writer has received a contract to have a work published – get advice from the SoA before you sign it!

Does being in academic journals or contributing to other people's books count?

Yes, it does. If writers have a body of recognised professional work published then they're eligible to join. But even if they're just starting out, they can join as an emerging author to take advantage of all the benefits: advice, discounts on insurances, DBS-checks, professional development training, events, guides, resources and, of course, our quarterly magazine, *The Author*.



Does self-published work count?

Yes, self-published and print-on-demand writers can join, either as an Associate member (if they're not begun making a profit yet) or as a Full Member (if they've sold over 300 print copies or 500 e-books in 12 months).

Also, do the Society have advice about self-publishing?

Yes, we offer bespoke advice to members on all forms of publishing.

We host regular online events on self-publishing, the recordings of these are on our Vimeo channel, we talk about self-publishing on our new podcast channel, SoA Sounds and there are general resources on our website.

As with any deal a writer is considering, we

Facts and figures about the Society of Authors

Formed in 1884 – 140 years old this year. See *Authors by Profession Volume I & II* for the full history!

***The World* greets the formation of the Society of Authors, 12 March 1884:**

Some Literary Gents the other day did meet

All in a private chamber, which looks on Garrick Street;

There did they meet together, and solemnly they swore

That as they had been done enough they would be done no more...

Walter Besant was the SoA's first Chair and Alfred Lord Tennyson was the SoA's first President.

140 years later... the crime writer Vanessa Fox O'Loughlin (writing as Sam Blake) takes over as Chair of the SoA's Management Committee (the board of directors), and later in the year our Fellows (our honorary body of 60 prominent SoA members) elect the SoA's next Honorary President.

Current membership: 12,400+ and counting.

Over 6,000 queries answered every year.

3,000 members joined us for 80 online and in-venue events in 2023.

Over a third of our membership belong to one of our network of 48 local groups, and we help organisers to run more than 250 local events and meetups each year!

recommend they always consult the SoA so that we can advise on a case-by-case basis.

What are the immediate benefits of being a member?

The key benefit of being a member of the Society of Authors is our advisory service. We vet contracts from publishers, agents and producers and we answer a huge volume of queries on a very broad range of topics, including: publishing and agency contracts, self-publishing, collecting societies abroad, chasing payment, unresponsive publishers,

copyright, reverting rights etc.

We also campaign for the much-needed good practice, better standards and transparency in hybrid publishing services and other so-called services to authors – and an end to the model where the author finances the publisher.

Sadly, we are already seeing a number of publishers going into liquidation in these tough economic times.

We offer a huge amount of practical support and advice (such as the #SoAatHome series: 'Industry Insider', 'Professional development' events etc), as well as grants and prizes.

On joining the SoA, members get free ALCS membership - essential for that extra income through licensing. And of course, members receive our quarterly magazine 'The Author' packed with articles and opinion pieces from authors, agents and publishers.

We also offer financial support to all authors. Last year, we distributed over £400,000 through our Contingency Fund, which any author can apply for and we also have a new fund the Drusilla Harvey Access grants that gives authors financial support for travel, subsistence, childcare or access needs for events, residencies, research and retreats.

Are there in-person meetings?

Yes, the Educational Writers Group provides networking opportunities through local groups and also through our series of 'SoA Lates' – social events at our Bedford Row Event Space in London.

We offer regular online socials. The last EWG online social was in December and it was a wonderful opportunity for the new committee to informally meet with other authors from the UK,

Spain, Argentina, and other countries.

Does the Society negotiate overall rates with publishers?

We negotiate collective minimum terms agreements with organisations such as the BBC, we work with key educational publishers on our Author-Publisher Guidelines, we encourage best practice in the industry e.g. the rates and fees publishers should be offering, and we lobby on policy and legislation to promote the interests and protect the rights of all authors.

Does the Society act on behalf of authors in any disputes?

We give individual guidance and advise on any issue or concern. Sharing Rhona's experience, we support members with clear and timely advice. Rhona recently received tax advice on a very complex (and stressful!) double taxation issue in a contract, which she would not have been able to negotiate by herself without considerable expense.

So while we will give general advice, we cannot incur legal expense or become directly involved in connection with difficulties pending at the time of joining or re-joining the SoA, or with publishing agreements where the author contributes towards the cost of production, problems arising outside the UK, or a dispute with another author.

We are not insured to give specific legal or financial advice but legal proceedings may be undertaken at our expense in exceptional circumstances with the consent of our Management Committee (the SoA's board of directors) if an issue of general concern to authors is at stake, and the risk and cost preclude individual action.

Ultimately, we will always support members as far as we can to help them to resolve their grievances.

Workshop Goes Wrong



CAT WEATHERILL prepared a family workshop for 12 people, only to be told with moments to go that 50 were coming. In the new *Goes Wrong* column, she shares how that felt, how it went — and what lessons she and we can take from it.

Doughnuts? I took a steadying breath. 'This flyer you sent out... Did it mention

there would be free doughnuts?'

By the time the doors opened, there was a queue waiting outside. Sixty parents, all under the happy impression that they would be listening to stories with their little ones while eating doughnuts. When they learned what was actually about to happen, they were horrified.

'Fifty? You are expecting fifty parents to come?'

The Head nodded, clearly thrilled. 'We sent a flyer home to invite everyone, and fifty have said yes so far. It's a fabulous response.'

It was an unbelievable response to be honest. This was a family storytelling workshop for parents in a primary school in a deprived part of Coventry. I knew this new Head had been working wonders, and I admired her determination to improve literacy through storytelling. But I had delivered family workshops before and knew they were a hard sell. I would normally expect ten to twelve parents to attend, not fifty. Now my brain was somersaulting, trying to adapt my plans to fit the expected numbers. I had planned a highly interactive hour. The parents would work in twos and threes, playing story games and telling stories to each other.

'What's the shape of the afternoon?' I asked.

'We'll open the doors at 1.15. Start the workshop at 1.30. That ends at 2.30. Then we'll have the tea and doughnuts, and then the children will join us at 3pm for a story before home at 3.15.'

I adapted my plans but nothing worked. They wouldn't play any games or join in any stories. They resisted encouragement. They remained guarded, watchful and totally silent. I had the surreal experience of asking questions and answering every one myself.

Forty minutes in, I moved on to showing how stories can be spun from everyday objects. This mostly involved sticking googly eyes onto various vegetables and kitchen utensils. Then I spun a story, using a simple Quest-type frame. But I needed suggestions at every step of the way: 'What is so special about this potato peeler? What magic power does it have?'



[Buy Cat's latest book](#)

Mercifully, one of the dads



finally took pity on me and started to contribute. He gave me wonderful suggestions and together we spun a story. Hurrah! I'd made it through to doughnut time. Everyone was happy again.

After the doughnuts, the children joined us for a story. It was the noisiest session I have ever known. Even the Head couldn't get the room to quieten down; the parents never stopped talking.

Finally, it was over. The Head and I were alone in the hall. I was utterly exhausted. 'I have earned my gin and tonic tonight,' I said.

The Head smiled. 'Totally.'

She was delighted at how the afternoon had gone and, chaotic and strained as the session might have appeared, I knew I had delivered the goods.

Earlier in my career, I would have been in a blind panic, apologising frantically.

Once home, I would have beaten myself up over my perceived failure. Inadequate planning, muddled delivery, poor content, inflexibility... What did I do wrong? Now I'm kinder to myself. I congratulate myself for getting through a tough session and focus solely on what I achieved.

To do what I do, I have to trust and believe I am achieving something. It's like sprinkling seeds onto hard soil. Some will grow and bloom in a short time. Some will lie dormant, perhaps for years, then start to grow. Some will never grow at all. That's fine. It is enough if just one seed grows.

I focus on the little signs of success. At doughnut time, I gave every parent a photocopied hand-out to take home, Cat's Top Tips for Storytelling. None were left behind at the end of the session. All went home.

No one left the workshop; no one brought out their phone. The parents might not have joined in, but they listened and observed for a full hour. All the ideas,

methods and suggestions I gave them remain stored, deep in their unconscious brain. I choose to believe that in a kitchen somewhere that night, one parent held up a carrot and said to their child: 'Once there was a carrot who was happy. Why was he happy? Because he had a friend - Peter Potato.'

Another parent went online to buy googly eyes. Another sent their child off to sleep with a made-up story about a magic doughnut.

Why was he magic? Well....



Cat Weatherill

Cat Weatherill is a best-selling author and storyteller who specialises in school visits. She is also a motivational speaker for children. See her work on catweatherill.co.uk and catweatherillauthor.com

The Workshop Must Go



MICHELENE WANDOR argues that the familiar format of a workshop does not suit creative writing and could be damaging writers.

I've been teaching Creative Writing (CW) since the early 1980s, in adult education, drama colleges, Arvon courses, universities and online. Currently I teach on a Distance Learning CW MA. In 2008 I wrote *The Author is Not Dead: Merely Somewhere Else*, presenting a history of CW and arguing that 'The Workshop Must Go'. This is my polemic here, which applies particularly to university MA courses, and is all the more necessary now that CW is an established success in academia.

I contend that the workshop is not pedagogically viable, either for students or teachers.

What people may get from it may have value, but it is piecemeal, makeshift and lacks continuity. There are better, more effective and, indeed, necessary alternatives. Please bear with me!

The workshop is the central mode of 'delivery' of CW. A group of students meet with a tutor, work-in-progress is read, and responses (feedback) are given, with the aim of helping the student improve their writing. The central focus of the workshop is thus on rewriting, not writing.

It is inevitably a fragmented process because a) not every student can have time in each session, and b) there is no space for continuity over the course's time-span for each student's work.

Photo by [Jason Goodman](#) on [Unsplash](#)

I want to begin by drawing attention to, and refuting, the regularly-expressed principles which underpin the workshop.

It teaches literary criticism – 'close reading'.

It can't. The legacies, and various forms of 'close reading' derive from a cluster of literary-critical approaches, with the potential insights of literary/cultural theory. Literary criticism developed to analyse and evaluate published literary work, not as a pedagogic technique for incomplete work-in-progress.

The workshop conducts 'peer reviewing'.

It does not. Students are a peer group, but in academia 'peer review' is a) conducted by experts, b) is anonymous – ie, not known to the author, c) is applied to completed texts. CW students are not experts (otherwise they wouldn't be students), they are not anonymous, the texts discussed are not complete and the 'author' is slap bang among them.

The workshop operates like a publisher's editor.

It doesn't. A publisher's editor works on a completed manuscript, after it is accepted for publication. Such editors have (or should have) extensive experience in a) critical reading, and b) an awareness of the potential market for the book.

The process is not anonymous, since writer and editor work together. Unlike the workshop, this relationship is one-to-one.

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The workshop is egalitarian, with the tutor's response just one among many.

I have never understood how this ever got off the ground. However tactful and encouraging a tutor may be, they are still the boss and every student knows and feels it. The tutor may well also be marking the students' final work and is in the workshop because s/he is an expert and carries authority, whether that is explicit or implicit. Dominance doesn't have to be spelled out to be active and felt.

The Alternative

In 2007, I began teaching on a Distance Learning MA in Creative Writing. It is part-time over two years and all tutorial work is one-to-one, online, in writing. There is a short mid-term online 'conference', where students post work and respond to each other, online and in writing over time - asynchronously. It is not a workshop. Some time is allocated for discussion of any writerly issues which may come up - first/third person narrative voice, for example. However, this is unplanned and unstructured.

Distance learning is not new. The Open College of the Arts (OCA) and the Open University (OU) initially ran 'correspondence' courses - ie, distance learning by post, and these courses are now online. This teaching has shown the pedagogic value of asynchronous one-to-one contact between student and tutor, in writing, over time.

'revelatory'

Professor Graham Mort's experience of teaching at the OCA is telling. Initially, he writes, the OCA considered distance learning 'as a second-best option'. However, the process turned out to be

revelatory: 'Ironically, the "second-best option" of distance learning has conveyed powerful pedagogic advantages - from the logistics of course delivery to the intricacies of textual analysis and drafting. Virtuality has strengthened the efficiency of the course and also our sense of contact and continuity.'

Graham Mort's theorisation develops important elements in 'the aesthetics of pedagogic systems in relation to Creative Writing':

'In a sense, the tutor and student "write" and "read" themselves and each other through their textual relationship. So the "rhetorical" strategies of literary texts are deployed into the educational exchange...Every aspect of virtual exchange is "writerly" so that writing skills are deployed in a range of ways from explication and composition to intervention and analysis...distance learning has conveyed powerful pedagogic advantages...'

Distance learning has served to highlight the superior value of online one-to-one tuition in writing, and the same principles can easily apply to on-campus teaching - backed up by face-to-face contact, and other kinds of class and seminar work.

With online tuition the focus is on the work alone, the language, the teacher-student relationship. As Mort has noted: 'Our projection of self became more uniform in one sense, but perhaps that offered us liberty to project a persona devoid of physically evidenced personality traits - to become a "character" in the narrative of educational exchange...'

Online one-to-one responses online can address individual style, language choices, structural issues, and more deeply, develop an engagement with the ongoing development of a student mind and imagination, creating its world through a varied and distinctive use of language - above all, with

developmental continuity. The online tutor 'reads' the student's mind and imagination, as well as their written text. Everything is always accessible because it is in writing, and thus available as a permanent record of the pedagogic process for the student.

However, this doesn't cover all the changes needed for CW.

Ancillary Studies

Historically, the acceptance of CW as a new 'discipline' in academia entailed disputes in some English departments - an irony, since most CW courses are within such departments.

Such tensions resulted in - depending on your perspective - either independence or isolationism; perhaps a combination of both.

Changes in CW pedagogy have the potential to heal such tensions, and ground CW more securely in broader cultural/intellectual contexts.

This has been reflected in a number of twenty-first-century suggestions to 'reform' the workshop.

Paul Dawson, in *Creative Writing and the New Humanities* (2005), argued for a 'sociological poetics' to be part of workshop practice. Janelle Adsit's *Toward an inclusive creative writing; threshold concepts to guide the literary curriculum* (2017), contends that biases of gender, race, and other identity markers should be addressed in the workshop. Felicia Rose Chavez's *The anti-racist writing workshop: how to decolonise the creative writing classroom* (2021) asserts that 'Control and dominance are trademarks of the traditional writing workshop and, by extension, white supremacy'.

'broader cultural context'

Note that none of the above question the workshop format itself, which is my purpose here.

All the above suggestions for expanding the cultural reach of CW may be valid and worth exploring, but it should be glaringly obvious that the workshop can't be the place for this.

Such educational expansions, which would provide a broader cultural context for CW pedagogy, need time, space and their own tracks of a more conventional academic kind; interdisciplinary lectures, seminars and writing essays.

This will affect the structure of courses, forms of assessment, and the most important matter of a rapprochement between English and CW.

What should happen next

I am under no illusion that what I have argued above will be easy to implement, even if there is the will to do so.

The reason I am urging it so strongly is precisely because of the success of CW, in academia and in the wider society. There is security in that, and this is exactly the moment to begin to effect radical change, both intrinsic and extrinsic, in CW pedagogy.

First, the workshop must be replaced with one-to-one tuition (just as it is for PhDs) online and in writing, for MAs. This applies both to distance and on-campus courses.

Second, there is a place for CW classes.

Reading groups can enable students to read their work to each other without the problematic (and ineffectual) pressure of feedback.

Craft issues can be explored in practical ways, away from students' own creative work.

Third, appropriately developed seminars can deal with the intellectual and cultural web within which CW sits.

Education in close textual reading is essential, linked to conventions of literary criticism and elements of literary/cultural theory.

CW courses require reflective commentaries and contextualisations (the discursive part of CW) and seminars can develop ways of thinking about writing, practical and theoretical.

Fourth, inevitably this will entail a rapprochement between English and CW, as well as connections with other appropriate strands of cultural studies.

It would be naïve to think that all the above can be done within the current span of the one-year (or two-year part-time) MA.

The American model of the two-three-year MFA is worth exploring seriously for the UK across the board, since its longer time-span allows for a real education in which CW is the central spur.

Of course, that begs various questions, including the cost to students and the one-to-one tuition alternative to the workshop - teaching in groups is cheaper for universities than this proposed alternative.

However, that's no reason to dismiss any of the ideas for reform - revolution, even.

And the economics could well balance out over time.

A relatively brief polemic such as this targets and invites controversy. It offers distilled concentrations which I am expanding and developing in my next book.

I will give Professor Mort the (almost) last word. He wrote that '...it became obvious ...that distance learning in Creative Writing has a special efficacy, efficiency and integration'.

In keeping with the principle of online response in writing, I suggest replacing that with '...one-to-one tutoring in Creative Writing has a special efficacy, efficiency and integration'.

Micheline Wandor is an acclaimed poet, playwright and cultural commentator. The Author is Not Dead, Merely Somewhere Else is published by Palgrave Macmillan. Her first novel, Orfeo's Last Act, is published in 2023 by Greenwich Express.



Photo by [Unseen Studio](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Unlocking Creative Writing Potential through Picture Books



ALEC MCAULAY recounts how he has used picture books to teach writing and screenwriting to students in Tokyo.

Photo by [Ben White on Unsplash](#)

Vocabulary: Non-native English speakers may have a relatively limited vocabulary, which can make it challenging for them to express themselves creatively. They can struggle to find the right words to convey their ideas and emotions.

Cultural Differences: Creative writing often involves exploring cultural and societal themes, which can be challenging for students who have not thought deeply about their own cultural context. This can make it difficult for them to create stories that resonate with an international audience (Jefferey & Wilcox 2016).

Grammar and Syntax: Non-native English speakers may struggle with grammar and syntax, which can affect the quality of their writing. They often focus on accuracy to a degree that becomes debilitating. Traina (2022: 43) suggests the challenge for teachers is to “shift my students’ perspective from writing accurately to writing authentically.”

Attitudes to self-disclosure: Non-native English speakers may lack confidence in telling personal stories, which can make it difficult for them to express themselves creatively. This can be particularly challenging in a classroom setting like Japan where they may feel self-conscious or embarrassed about disclosing information and stories that they consider to be private (Iwata 2010).

These challenges are couched in terms of creative output, but they also apply to input.

For many years, I have had my students watch short films and asked them to write short film screenplays and project proposals. The reason for this is that when I ask my Japanese students to, for example, read novels, or short stories, or watch feature films, there is an added time constraint because their English proficiency levels mean they require a considerable amount of time to process the materials provided.

The advantages of short films are that they take up less time than feature films, the focus is visual rather than reading-based literacy, which my students prefer, and they often (though not always) convey stories that can be universally understood. Short films allow me to provide models as input in digestible chunks, but there has always been a problem with output.

In particular, students often struggle with genre conventions. They may understand a short film that is a ‘fish out of water’ story, such as *Fish Out of Water* (2005) by Lala Rolls, or a ‘revenge tale,’ such as *Whacked* (1998) by Rolf Gibbs.

However, a bit like playing golf, understanding the action when carried out by a professional is one thing, but executing the same level of performance yourself is quite another.

In sum, when using short films with my students, I have been happy with the level of understanding they achieve regarding appreciation of the form.

However, satisfaction levels drop for both me and the students when it comes to the quality of output in their short film scripts and/or project proposals. A recent encounter with the world of picture books offered the potential to resolve this output problem.

Picture books for input

In terms of input, picture books have an advantage over shorts films in three ways. First of all, there is ease of access. Award-winning and critically-acclaimed short films, especially recent films, can be difficult to source, but many can be accessed through read-aloud videos on YouTube and other platforms.

Second, the read-aloud videos are shorter than most short films. One example of both these points is CBeebies on YouTube offering up Tom Hardy, who takes just over six minutes to read Julia Donaldson and Victoria Sandøy’s *The Oak Tree*, published in 2023. [It can be watched here.](#)

Third, the read-aloud videos usually come with closed captions, providing listening and reading options for students, many of whom have taken the class primarily to improve their English proficiency.

Teaching picture book writing: familiarization

I started teaching picture book writing in the spring term of 2023. The first stage of the course involved using online resources to expose students to the variations in the form.

There are basically three types of picture book: story books, concept books, and novelty books (Dils 2009). For the purposes of my class, students did not need an in-depth explanation of the historical evolution of picture books and the complexity of the current market; they only needed an idea of different story types they could work with for their own project. With that in mind, we started by watching/reading five picture books.

Each of these picture books model different types of stories, compelling students to think about which type of story they wanted to tell.



Frame from “Bedtime Stories: Tom Hardy reads *The Oak Tree*” on CBeebies

1. *Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?* (2005), by Martin Waddell and Barbara Firth.

This is the story of Baby Bear, who can't get to sleep because he is scared of the dark. We called this type of story 'childhood memory,' a tale based on a familiar childhood experience.

2. *The Big Bath House* (2021), by Kyo Maclear and Gracey Zhang.

In this book, a little girl takes a trip to the local public bathhouse while on a visit to her Japanese grandparents. It is a celebration of a cultural tradition and ritual, so we called this type of story 'cultural window.'

3. *The Tide* (2019), by Clare Helen Walsh and Ashling Lindsay.

A little girl goes on an outing to the beach with her beloved grandfather. Grandad has dementia, and his memory is compared to the tide; it ebbs and flows. This story helps children to understand dementia in the family, so we labelled this 'educational.'

4. *Princess Smartypants* (2004), by Babette Cole.

Princess Smartypants does not want to get married and sees off all her would-be suitors. The story playfully problematizes historical gender roles in traditional stories, so we called this 'updated fairytales.'

5. *The Gruffalo* (2006), by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler.

We looked at *The Gruffalo* to expose students to rhyming stories. I pointed out that many picture book stories do rhyme, but students should not attempt to write a rhyming narrative. There are craft and industry barriers that I briefly tell them about, but the main point to notice is that rhyme is just too difficult!

Teaching picture book writing: starting to write

After the first few weeks we had four story types that students could work with: (a) Childhood Memory (b) Cultural Window (c) Educational (d) Updated Fairytale.

For the next few weeks, students had three tasks. First, they had to come up with a story idea for each of the four types.

This gave them a choice of ideas they could discuss with their classmates before choosing one to take forward. Their second task was to do the assigned reading, which was handouts I had put together based on readings from courses I had taken in picture books through Writer's Digest and FutureLearn.

This introduced storytelling universals such as creating engaging characters, and what to include in Beginnings, Middles and Endings.

In addition, it focused on picture book specifics, such as using simple language, having complementary images and text, and formatting your dummy correctly. Their third task was to watch/read an assigned picture book each week. They all watched

different picture book videos, and then worked in small groups to provide a critique for their classmates. The second and third task deepened their understanding of picture books and allowed them to develop their English proficiency through sharing their ideas and opinions with their classmates. The first task, however, is where their creativity flourished.

'myriad engaging and intriguing ideas'

The students came up with myriad engaging and intriguing ideas for each of the story types. For instance, for Updated Fairytale, one student proposed working with the Japanese tale of Momotaro/ Peach Boy. This is the story of a boy, born from a peach, who grows up and gathers a band of allies to go and fight demons. The student wanted to re-work the story from the demons' point of view, making them the victims and Momotaro the aggressor.

For Cultural Window, one student developed a wonderfully visual tale about a little boy who gets lost at the summer fireworks festival in Gifu prefecture.

Most students, however, chose to work with the Childhood Memory option. One student, Keiko, shared her memory of the family getting a dog when she was little. She loved the dog, but the dog did not like her. This was a simple idea, instantly engaging, that contained great picture book potential. I use Keiko's project here as an example of how we worked from idea to completed draft through various assigned tasks during the course.

Teaching picture book writing: writing tasks

Task 1 required students to come up with an approximately 100-word Childhood Memory idea for a picture book. This was Keiko's submission.

There was a dog called Hana in my house when I was a child. I loved Hana very much, but she hated me. Hana always barked at me. My parents didn't want me to go near Hana, because she could hurt me. However, I still love her and I made many works imitating Hana in art class at school. I loved her droopy ears and big black eyes, but I could pet her only when she was sleeping in the garden. My mother sometimes finds me sleeping next to Hana sleeping.

This idea stood out because it has the essential building blocks of visual storytelling.

There is conflict in the hook of a little girl's unrequited love for her pet dog.

The idea also has visual potential in, for example, the little girl doing drawings and paintings of her dog.

Next, the students had to write out a one-page version of this story with a clear beginning, middle and end.

We talked about having middle-section obstacles for the protagonist to overcome, and adding detail and episodes to the relationship between the girl and the dog. After some back-and-forth, Keiko received a great note on her story, which was to write it from the dog's perspective.

The idea was fleshed out and became the following:

A small dog called Hana lives in the garden of a family's house.

A girl was born in the house.

Adults seem busy taking care of the baby girl.

Hana was sad to be alone in the garden.

The girl is getting bigger, but the dog hates her, because she always pulls Hana's tail and chases her.

Hana decided "I would bark if she tried to come near to me".

Few years later, she got bigger than Hana.

Hana still hates her, because she sometimes tries to pick Hana up or drag by the collar.

Hana thought, "I decided I would ignore her if she tried to touch me."

One day, it was snowing. Hana was so cold.

Hana calls her family, because she wants to enter the house. However, no one hears her call.

She got tired got sleepy and went to sleep.

The girl thought Hana might be cold now, and she took sleeping Hana to her house.

A few hours later, Hana woke up with a sound crackling something.

Hana finds herself by the fireplace, next to a girl she didn't like.

However, it was warm and comfortable there.

Hana thought, "I would like to sleep a little longer."

After that, the girl gently got up, brought her blanket and put it on the dog and smiled.

The next stage involved writing the story in picture book format. In general, picture books stick to a quite prescriptive format, which is 32 pages in length.

My students were operating as authors only, not author-illustrators. Authors are advised to keep illustration suggestions to a minimum, so as not to impinge on the creativity of the illustrator.

However, I did not want to fetter my students' imagination, so I let them make as many illustration suggestions as they wanted to.

The next few classes were spent on re-writing. Students brought successive drafts to class and we ran peer feedback sessions, each time focusing on different elements.

Proper formatting was the main topic one week, while complementary text and images was salient another week. The main notes on the one-pager of Keiko's story were that more episodes were needed in the middle. Watching the video of *Not Now Bernard* led to a discussion of the use of repetition and story

bookends, two elements that Keiko attempted to bring into her story. Keiko's final draft (below, formatted for this article) is a strong draft that richly develops the initial 100-word Childhood Memory idea.

A Dog and A Girl by Keiko Kono

[illustration suggestions in blue]

Pages 2–3 :A small dog called Hana, lived in a garden of a house.

4–5:A girl was born in the house. Adults seemed busy to take care of her. Hana was sad to be alone in the garden.

6–7: The girl was getting bigger, but the dog hated her, because she always pulls Hana's tail and chase her. Hana thought "I have to teach her. I will bark if she tried to come near to me." However, it didn't matter with the girl. The girl liked to play with the dog.

[Dog barking. Girl smiles and does not care]

8–9: Few years later, she got bigger than Hana. Hana still hated her, because she sometimes tried to pick Hana up or drag by the collar. Hana thought "I have to teach her. I will ignore her if she tried to touch me."

However, it didn't matter to the girl. The girl loved to take care of Hana.

10–11: One day, it was snowing and the wind was so cold. Hana thought "it's too cold to be here."

[Snow in garden. Snow falling on Hana]

12–13: Hana called her family. She scratched the door. However, no one heard it.

14–15: She was getting tired and sleepy. She fell asleep in the cold garden.

16–17: The girl was painting a picture of Hana in the house. She suddenly thought that Hana might be cold now.

18–19: Then, she took sleeping Hana to her house.

20–21: A few hours later, Hana woke up with a sound something crackling. Hana founds herself by the fireplace, next to the girl she didn't like. However, it was warm and comfortable there. Hana thought "I would like to sleep a little longer."

22–23: After that, Hana behaved like any other dog. Hana always moved with her, and only barked at her when she was about to leave the house. Hana might love the girl!

24–25: Many years later, the girl became an adult. Hana and a girl have a happy life. However, suddenly she disappeared from the house.

26–27: Hana worried about her and waited for her. But she has never come home.

28: One day, the mother of the girl took Hana somewhere. Hana was being transported at high

speed for a long time in a small box that she could barely see outside. Hana fell asleep in the dark.

29: Hana didn't know how long she slept. The girl was there when Hana woke up! Hana was in the new house. Hana wagged her tail and jumped to tell her how happy she was!

That place was her new house. She decided to live with Hana.

30-31: Now, Hana pulled her clothes and chased her around. Finally, she loved her!

32: Back Matter

Keiko's project is a good example of how picture book writing can help EFL students to fully explore their creative writing potential. Keiko studied picture book form and developed her narrative in stages, changing the initial idea so that the story is told from the dog's point-of-view, using repetition, and adding the idea of the girl coming back at the end as an adult who takes Hana to live with her.

The bookending of Hana playfully annoying the girl, flipping the roles from beginning to end, was a layer written into the final draft.

Of course, no draft is ever perfect, and a future draft would need to address some on-the-nose elements.

But Keiko's project is an example of how picture books allow EFL students to journey from idea to completed draft while learning craft and utilizing their own English language proficiency in creative ways.

The wealth of resources available for input, and the accessible and manageable nature of the output, make picture books an ideal medium for linguistic and artistic exploration in the EFL Creative Writing classroom. While watching read-aloud videos, the visual narrative elements provide contextual support, aiding comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Simultaneously, the concise format encourages students to convey their ideas with brevity, honing their writing skills. Overall, picture books offer an appropriate blend of linguistic and visual elements, compact format, and relatively easy comprehensibility, enriching the creative writing experience for aspiring storytellers.

Keiko is a pseudonym. The student's work is reprinted with permission. All language errors have been left uncorrected.

Dr. Alec McAulay is originally from Glasgow, Scotland, but has lived in Japan since 1989. He teaches screenwriting, creative writing and EFL at Yokohama National University. A member of Screenwriting Research Network, his research interests include transnational cinema in the Japanese context. His short films have screened and won awards at various international film festivals. He also writes children's books and is Assistant Regional Advisor in SCBWI Japan.

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Igniting Spark Young Writers



EMMA BONIWELL enthuses about Writing West Midlands and its long-running Spark Young Writers programme which you can benefit from as much as the children.

Writing West Midlands is best known as the literature development agency for the West Midlands, wears many hats, including running the *Birmingham Literature Festival*, but it has a hidden gem – a creative writing programme for young people. Working outside the school environment, the programme *Spark Young Writers* runs groups in libraries, art galleries, theatres and museums in 20 locations spread throughout the region.

These groups are run by professional writers of all stripes, and – crucially – are supported by assistant writers who volunteer their time to make the groups work. These volunteers come from a multitude of sources, and with a variety of reasons for getting involved. Some are working in education already, like you, but haven't run workshops. Or they run workshops all the time but want to see how other writers do it.

The benefits of volunteering in Spark Young Writers

You learn how to run creative writing workshops by doing and you also find time for your own creative writing as you write right alongside the children.

Then there is the experience of working with children plus, of course, volunteering looks great on a CV.

A key benefit, exclusively offered to *Spark Young Writers* assistants, is access one-to-one careers advice

from Writing West Midlands. Plus you are joining a network of like-minded writers across the region.

How it works

For two hours a month during the school year, these assistant writers learn through observation and practise how to run creative writing workshops for children and young people.

They are involved with the planning of the sessions, work with the lead writer to develop their skills in delivering parts of the sessions themselves, see how to showcase the work that's been done by the young people for satisfaction of the young people themselves, learn lots of skills in engaging young people with writing, work alongside children as they explore their creativity and play with words.

It's a chance for some assistant writers to have a go at creative writing themselves – to get in touch with their childish self and simply enjoy, as the children are doing, without any pressures.

'removing barriers'

Their presence in the group is often key to including and embracing the challenges some children have in maintaining focus and concentration, in removing barriers to enjoyment in the written word by helping put the letters on the page, by gentle encouragement and praise for excellent word choices, or laughing at a description of a person so real that you can see them.

Some of our writers are students who opted to study science but miss the opportunity to write creatively.

Some others are writers who are waiting for their

book to be published and want to be able to offer creative writing workshops in schools with confidence when asked. Still others love writing and want to communicate that love to children, in a way that they themselves missed out on through formal education. Perhaps they are thinking about a career as a teacher but want to get experience of working with young people before making the leap into training.

Our workshops are such fun that our lead writers jump at the chance to volunteer as an assistant writer when sickness or other commitments cause a gap.

Here's what one of our assistant writers, Laura Wetton, had to say:

'I've loved being an assistant writer. It's wonderful to see children of all ages and backgrounds interact with each other in a safe, relaxing, and creative setting where they are guided by an experienced lead writer.

'However big or small the groups are (I've assisted with both) the children can freely bounce ideas off each other, feel at ease and have a good laugh!

'It's great that there aren't the restraints of a classroom: no writing is judged, graded, or has a set structure to it as it might in a lesson in school; they can write what they want in the style they want, with the guidance of an experienced lead writer.

'Assistant writers also can get to know Writing West Midlands and are kept up to date with opportunities and events (such as the Birmingham Literature Festival or the National Writers conference).

'I've had the opportunity to assist the lead writer with short tasks and warm ups too during the workshops, and I've gained experience in interacting with and guiding young writers. I'd only ever interacted with writers of my own age before, and I find myself being inspired by them too!'

Witnessing first hand the imagination displayed by children and young people when presented with the opportunity to write is awe inspiring in the best possible way. Who wouldn't want to spend a couple of hours on a Saturday doing it? [Read more and apply](#) to be a *Spark Young Writers* assistant.



Emma Boniwell



NOW AVAILABLE

Writing in Practice

Volume 9 2023

NAWE's Journal of Creative Writing Research, *Writing in Practice*, is a peer-reviewed journal that aims to explore the nature of the art of writing, highlighting current academic thinking and practice, and reflecting on this with an international outlook.

The journal encourages the investigation of a broad range of possible approaches to Creative Writing, focusing in particular on critical discussion of creative processes, and critical examination of the history and pedagogy of Creative Writing in all contexts.

It also aims to encourage research in the field of Creative Writing, including practice-based and practice-led research. Creative Writing itself is welcomed when integral to an article.

The latest edition, volume 9, has now been published. Download the [new issue PDF here](#).

My Most Costly Mistake

KATE INNES is about to make you choke with a calamitous error – and the impress you with how she shows we can make fantastic lemonade when we have to.

I'm an Indie writer of mainly historical fiction. As such, I'm also a publisher. Sometimes this secondary aspect of my job trips me up.

It's only now I feel able to admit to this mistake, now that the hours and hours it took to rectify have passed.

More than two years later.

And I'm sharing this story in the hope that you can avoid a similarly embarrassing life lesson!

Back in April 2021, I'd just finished my 4th book, entitled *Greencoats*, a middle grade historical fantasy set during WW2. I'd taken care to choose an easy-to-read font. I'd found an excellent illustrator to bring it to life. I'd edited it over and over so the lines flowed. It was ready to go to print.

Or so I thought.

I have an old computer with old software. Seriously old in computer years.

You see, I like my old, familiar ways. I trained as an archaeologist after all. I know where I am with ancient things.

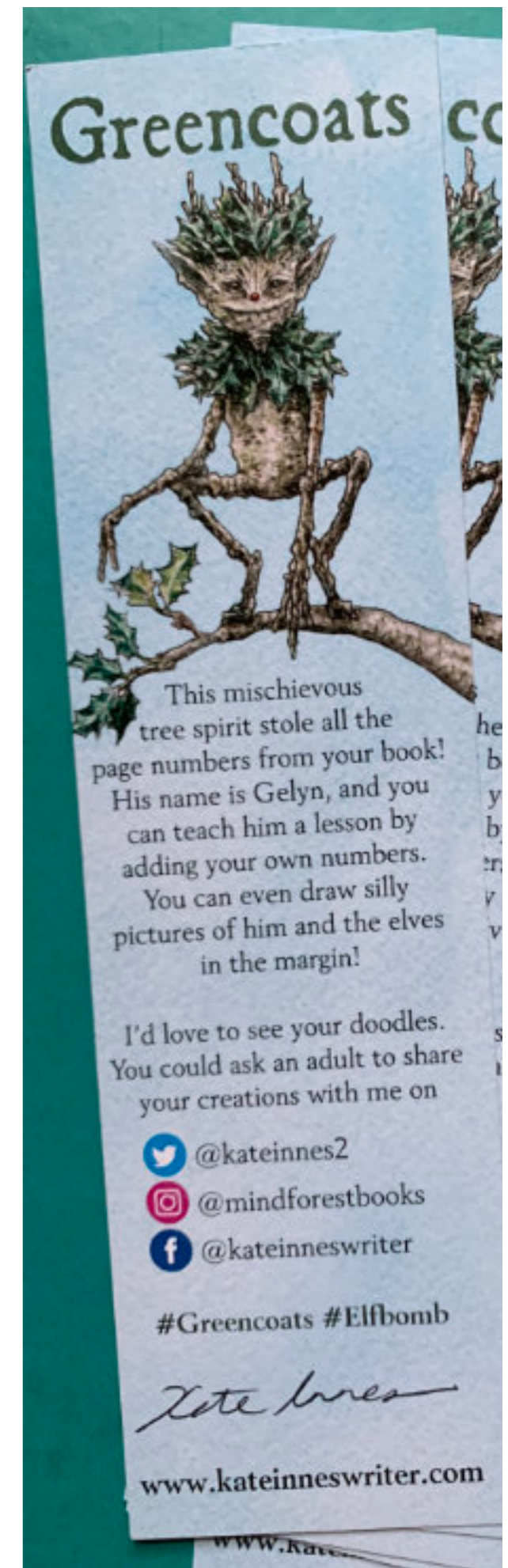
But computers develop glitches with age, just like people do.

They run out of memory and energy. Become intransigent.

It's particularly common for a glitch to occur when you need to do something in a hurry, and life is already stressful.

COVID was in the air, I had three teenagers at home, and I was planning on publishing two books before Christmas. If I didn't get this version to the printer, they wouldn't be able to deliver before the (small, outdoor, socially-distanced) launch event in May.

All my plans would fall apart.



Fast forward two weeks to the moment I open the first box of books. I do a flip through.

No page numbers.

I almost faint. The printer must've made a mistake. But it'll be the printer who has to fix it. And fix it quick! I run to my desktop and reload the proof I approved.

No page numbers.

It's my fault, not the printer's.

I stand still for a long time feeling sick. I want to cry. I want to burn them. I want to give up.

Instead, after a few deep breaths and lots of swearing, I conclude I'll have to live with it. It's too expensive to reprint. Serves me right for including elves in my story. Of course they would make mischief. What was I thinking?

I visit one of my best friends. We laugh. Well she does, and I pretend. Then she (a PR and Marketing genius) gives me the first solution, turning the problem into an opportunity: making bookmarks.

The addition of bookmarks made everything okay. I was able to make light of the issue and see the empty whiteness at the bottom of the pages as freeing, expressive, doodle space.

But I quickly realised that it was impractical for schools to use books without page numbers, and I dearly hoped lots of schools would use Greencoats as part of their WW2 curriculum.

I needed another solution.

And that's where my Great Wall Model 46 Mechanical



[Buy Greencoats from Kate Innes](#)



Kate Innes

Numbering Stamp from Shanghai came into the story.

Luckily I quite enjoy watching sport. I sat in front of the TV with a wooden board on my lap, and stamped the pages.

I made lots of mistakes, like printing the numbers upside down or missing a number because someone was about to score a try or win the gold medal.

But after a while I got better at it, and the clever numberer would click over – all the way to page 285. A number seared into my brain.

I estimate that I numbered around 170 books, pressing down that numberer approximately 48,450 times. Impressively, It's still in perfect working order.

But am I in perfect working order?

No. I never will be. I'll always make mistakes.

But now I have a new mantra. A motto I whisper to myself whenever I'm feeling stressed about getting something done.

DON'T RUSH

I've decided this is a key piece of wisdom which will help me in all kinds of situations, not just writing and publishing.

DON'T RUSH

With my kids, family, walks, creativity, friends, teaching, driving, cleaning, listening, and enjoying life.

DON'T RUSH

Last week I finished stamping the last unnumbered book. The numberer has fallen silent.

I'm getting ready to order a reprint. Wish me luck!

Big Stories, Written in Wrexham (and the Cloud)



ELEN CALDECOTT and JOANNA NISSEL on how organizations coming together led to writing that brought communities together too.

Occasionally, there is a delicious confluence of a funding call, the work you actually want to do and the art you are intending to make.

We were lucky enough to have these particular stars align earlier this year. This article is a report on the community-based writing project that grew out of this funding call and will be of interest to writers wanting to work in a hybrid way with diverse communities.

In 2022, Elen had published a book for children, *The Blackthorn Branch*, set in a contemporary community in North Wales.

She wanted to share that work with children and families in that community and use it as a launching off point for their own creativity; Lancaster University – the institution Elen calls home – wanted to support the impact of its researchers' work with a small pot of money.

So, a funding bid was written, and schemes were laid.

The Blackthorn Branch was inspired by local folklore and legend, so with that in mind, Elen planned to run three creative writing sessions in libraries across the Wrexham district, where the people attending would be encouraged to write flash fiction and poetry based on wishes, folklore and local stories.

These would be *Big Stories, Written in Wrexham*. So far, so good. However, Lancaster University was also hoping for a social or policy impact (with the language of REF looming). So, Elen decided that the writing workshops would just be the beginning, the catalyst for a longer-term project.

We would start in a community, in-person space and fly online, to the cloud. Wrexham has pockets of high social deprivation and a tradition of manual and blue-collar work. Our *Big Stories* could evolve in a shared, digital space which would increase our writers' familiarity with teamworking via the internet – potentially opening up new avenues of work and employment.

As part of our plan, Elen ran the workshops on the ground, with the enthusiastic and very welcome help of the local librarians. Joanna, who was at the time

resident in Germany, served as the cloud-based editor and collaborator for the writers. The initial meetings took place over three successive Saturdays in the Easter holidays.

We had 40 people attend and write. Some had signed up, intending to take part, while others had anticipated being chaperones, but were tempted into writing on the day. There were a mixture of children, parents and grandparents, and adult writers.

The workshops had been advertized as part of Wrexham's 'Carnival of Words' and were well attended. Using map-making, photo prompts and lists of magic wishes or memories (depending on the age of the participants!), the writers produced first drafts of flash fiction and poetry about beloved family members and pets, memories of their own childhoods, journeys to fantastical lands and one very memorable concrete poem about Wrexham striker Paul Mullin.

Crucially, everyone wrote their stories on paper and added a contact email address. This email address was used first to share our plans (including data protection info) and then as the main point of contact for the writer. Elen gathered up the handwritten paper, scanned it all and uploaded the scans to a shared Drive.

At this point, we moved online

Joanna deciphered the handwritten texts and transcribed them to a Google doc – one for each writer. She added praise where it was merited and offered editorial suggestions; we considered using track-changes for this, but an initial assessment (using pre-project questionnaires) indicated that many of our participants were very unfamiliar with word processing programmes and we felt track-changes were a step too far. Instead, Joanna simply added her comments in green.

When all the documents were ready, Elen changed the access to the cloud documents, enabling anyone with the link to edit.

We did consider limiting access to specific email accounts, but were fairly certain that would create an unnecessary barrier to participation, as people inevitably logged in with a different email address to the one they had given us or – as with one blended family – had children living in multiple homes sharing one point of contact.

Over the next two months, the participants were invited to edit the Google document in situ, then copyedit and proofread it – all with Joanna's help and oversight. This was all done asynchronously, online.

We are so proud that we didn't lose a single participant in this move online; everyone who wrote a piece of flash fiction or poem at one of the Saturday workshops ended up publishing that edited piece with us in an anthology. Pieces like this, by Jan Wilkins, on visiting a colliery:

'We left the sun shining valiantly across the hills and descended lower than the sundance valley shadows. Conversation was impossible in the rattling pulley lift, chains clanking in the unoiled mechanism. The darkness was palpable in the corners and unlit tunnels. Lamps shone

from heads, men like puppets, time managing their strings. I put my notebook away.

Because this was the final piece of the project and we wanted to come full-circle, we returned to the in-person physical world with a published anthology.

This was typeset and designed by Elen using Canva and Kindle Direct Publishing. As part of the funding, we received enough money to buy a print-on-demand copy of the book for all our writers.

They returned to the library where the workshop had taken place to collect the book from the ever-welcoming librarians – and complete their post-project questionnaire. We were able to compare pre- and post- project questionnaires for 21 participants (the remaining participants didn't return their post-project questionnaires).

In terms of the impact of the project, we were looking at self-reported confidence levels in writing, editing and working online as part of a team, using a five-point Likert scale. Analysis of the questionnaires suggests the project had a significant effect on confidence around writing (with an average of half a point improvement on the scale), a smaller effect on confidence in online working (with an average of a .2 point improvement on the scale) and a detrimental effect on confidence in editing (with an average of a .3 drop on the scale).

It's possible that the participants were being edited for the first time and perhaps left the project with a better understanding of what it means to edit and this was linked to a drop in confidence.

As well as the Likert scale, we also invited qualitative comments, and these were overwhelmingly positive. The young people said things like, "It was an awesome experience" and "I'd like to do it all again".

One parent reported that her son went on to write more stories, another said her daughter was able to talk about personal loss after writing about a recent bereavement. Of the adults, one called the experience "priceless" and another intends to enrol on a creative writing course.

So, as facilitators, we are delighted by the outcome and have reason to believe that the participants are too. We are grateful that the funding body – and the amazing librarians – made it possible to create our Big Stories, Written in Wrexham.

With thanks to: Wrexham Carnival of Words, Lancaster University, the Librarians who hosted us so wonderfully, and all the brilliant participants.

Dr Elen Caldecott is an author for children and young adults whose work has been twice longlisted for the Carnegie Award, shortlisted for the Waterstones Children's Book Award and has won the Tir Na n'Og Award. She teaches Creative Writing at Lancaster University in the UK. Poet and researcher,

Joanna Nissel, is currently completing a PhD in poetry mentorship at the Universities of Southampton and Bath Spa, funded by the SWWDTP. Her debut poetry pamphlet, Guerrilla Brightenings, was published in 2022 by Against the Grain Press.

We Wear Ourselves

SHAROON SUNNY on life writing when your life has been through COVID.

My journey with life writing began in the aftermath of COVID-19, as I was guiding first-year undergraduate students towards articulating their lived experiences. I've taught it since and have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of life writing.

Each year, the course begins with a cohort of thirty-five students utterly baffled by the concept of delving into their personal lives in an academic setting. They grapple with the requirements, questioning how they can transform something so intimate and private into a course assignment. And most importantly, they ponder the very essence of their narrative – what exactly will I write about?

'personal pandemonium'

All of this personal pandemonium ensues because culturally, Indians are raised with a sense of sanskara (values) and dharma (duty) towards the family and the society. The cultural emphasis on sanskara and dharma within Indian society has fostered a collective, societal expectation of obedience, respect for elders, and social conformity, often at the expense of individual wants, feelings, and desires.

This ingrained worldview often leads to internal conflict and personal turmoil as individuals strive to reconcile their personal aspirations with societal norms.

The challenge then is to empower these young adults to embrace their individuality and recognize that their inner aspirations and angst are valid and worthy of expression. They must understand that self-expression is not a sign of deviance or selfishness but rather a crucial aspect of personal growth and fulfillment. In many ways their dharma towards themselves.

Wrestling experience into narrative involves the process of taking raw, unorganized information and shaping it into a coherent and meaningful story. This may involve selecting and interpreting certain events and details, and crafting a narrative arc that reflects the person's journey through life.

However, it is also important to recognize that not all life narratives are created equal and that there are power dynamics at play. Some voices may be privileged and heard more easily while others may be silenced or marginalised.

As an instructor, it is crucial to actively work to create a space where all voices can be heard and to recognize the ways in which power and privilege shape the telling of these stories.



Sharoon Sunny

The mixed group of young minds that I teach each year range from the halls of privilege to the corridors of resilience—some have gone to elite private institutions while others have had a hand-to-mouth existence. Hence access to English and the ability to present their aspirations in English is not always the same. Despite the uneven terrain of their educational journeys, these aspiring storytellers are united by an unyielding desire to unveil their inner landscapes.

The question that I'm always grappling with even before the semester begins is to find ways to break the task of writing into enjoyable and achievable segments. So, at the very start, to get them past their jittery nerves, we begin with free writing. Many, surprisingly, have never free written and so find the entire process both exciting and challenging the first few times.

But, by the time we are closer to the end of the semester, I've had students leave positive comments where they say,

I usually tend to censor myself while writing but freewriting helped me write with more freedom and self-confidence. It also made me realize that it's better to write something and then edit, than not write it at all.

Before the free writing I would always wait for a complete framework to form before beginning to write, but with free writing I learnt to just sit down and start writing about the theme and I found I could write a lot (for my second segment I wrote close to 700 words in 1 sitting) which I could then edit and refine later.

During read-aloud sessions following freewriting, there's an energy that transforms the classroom—

laughter mingles with applause, nods of agreement intermix with murmurs of appreciation, and bodies sway with the rhythm of shared stories. This collective expression of joy and engagement underscores the power of language to connect us, revealing the diverse interpretations inspired by a common set of prompts. Sometimes, these prompts were entirely collaborative, while other times, I provided them.

For example, when I was guiding students through description, the kind that is not overdone or trite, I posed the prompt: "In 100 words, try to delve into the details of a floor you frequently traverse."

Such a prompt demands a heightened sense of mindfulness, an act of being fully present in the moment. To many young minds, this concept can seem foreign, almost alien.

After all, what is a floor but a mundane part of their daily existence, something that exists solely to provide support and stability? Yet, as they delve into the exercise, they are struck by a sudden realization: they know very little about the floors that carry them through their lives. Accustomed to navigating these surfaces on autopilot, they find it surprisingly challenging to articulate the textures, colors, and hues of these everyday companions.

This heightened awareness extends beyond the visual realm, encompassing the tactile sensations as well. Almost like an epiphany, they realize the cool smoothness of the floors beneath their bare feet, the rough texture of the stone steps, the warmth of the wooden planks under their fingertips—what was once a passive element, becomes a source of sensory delight.

As they delve deeper into their exploration, they realize that the floor is not merely a physical surface but a repository of memories and experiences. Each scuff mark, each worn patch, each stain bears witness to the lives that have unfolded upon it.

The floor becomes a silent chronicler of their lives, a tangible reminder of the countless footsteps that have traversed its surface. Through this simple exercise, they rediscover the extraordinary within the ordinary, transforming the commonplace into a source of wonder and inspiration. The floor, once a taken-for-granted element of their environment, emerges as a silent storyteller, a treasure trove of hidden details waiting to be unearthed.

From this foundation of heightened awareness and mindfulness, they journey towards bringing their lives into focus.

Carefully parsing, sieving, and folding each recollection, selecting those that resonate with their inner selves and hold the potential to captivate their readers. As they delve deeper into storytelling they begin to grapple with the question of control, seeking to articulate their experiences in a manner that empowers them while simultaneously captivating the reader.

As one student said to me, "I would love for this to be all about me, but I also owe it to my reader to make this a conversation where the two of us discover something about each other."

This is my reward!

Yes, I want my students to learn to write and I want them to write about their lives, but I also want them to learn quite intentionally this particular act of writing lives is more than just writing.

It is about creating a deeper understanding of the person and their place in the world, and encouraging readers to see these lives in relation to their own. They realize that their words can serve as a beacon of empathy, fostering understanding and bridging the divides that often separate us.

They embrace the responsibility that comes with sharing their voices, recognizing that their narratives hold the potential to inspire, challenge, and transform.

So, we begin with small—attempt 300 words before we get into longer narratives. Students get to choose from a wide-ranging set of prompts. However, several students gravitate towards one particular prompt: "What is the most difficult phone call you've ever had to make?"

Delving into this prompt isn't always easy for students, nor is it easy for me to guide them.

One student began with a wonderful anecdote about how her grandparents moved in with them during COVID-19 and all the unexpected joys it brought with it. We were all enthralled and relished the anecdotes almost as if we were there, partaking with her. But, none of us anticipated the tragic ending—my parents and grandmother left in the ambulance and I was given my grandfather's phone to inform his friends of his passing!

In a writing class where students' abilities vary widely, it can be challenging to guide them in a way that ensures everyone feels a sense of achievement with their writing. Some enter with a self-imposed label of inadequacy, convinced that writing will forever elude them. Their efforts, despite their best intentions, often result in frustration and disappointment. Writing doesn't come intuitively, and despite their best efforts, they face setbacks.

To help them overcome these challenges, I explore alternative approaches that might spark their writing potential, and so I have to find other ways that might help them write, and so we try poetry. Many students believe the hallowed grounds of poetry is not to be treaded on. However, when I introduce them to approachable poetic forms like the lute, cinquain, renga, palindromes, freeverse or the haiku, they shed their self-imposed labels and begin to write.

Experimentation begins a series of connections within and outside of themselves. They craft a single haiku and discover the beauty inherent in a single verse, realizing that when multiplied, these concise poems possess a collective strength and resonance. They break free from conventional boundaries, embracing the playful freedom of palindromes and the unrestrained fluidity of free verse. Their long-form narratives are punctuated with bursts of short poetic interludes. This playful exploration leads them to discover the haibun—prose and haiku that allows them to weave together narrative threads with haiku's evocative power.

Here's a Devansh's free verse about the Corona Times

Corona Times - Devansh Mishra

*The year started off as a curse,
Kobe and Iranian general were in doubt,
And just as we thought it couldn't get worse,
The month of March came about.
The world was thrown into panic,
Fear of other human beings evolved,
The changes in our lifestyle were drastic,
Lockdowns for countless days were involved.
People were forced to stay at home,
To flatten the curve was their task,
No one could go out to roam,
Groceries was an exception, provided with a mask.
Sitting at home, with nothing to do,
Other than studies and Netflix, a new blue,
Swiggy and Zomato were far overdue
The hole of missing friends needed to be filled.
Crossing borders of caste and race
The world healing had begun
To tempt fate, it was never our place,
In the end, we now have the realization*

That we are all one. I ask myself too about my own feelings as I navigate my way teaching such a course. Nurturing individual voices through life narratives in a society that often silences personal experiences is not easy to do.

Negotiating the diverse linguistic landscapes of my classroom, where students of varying English proficiency coexist, demands a delicate balance of inclusivity and harmony.

I am fortunate to have grown up multilingual, possessing the ability to seamlessly navigate between English, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, and Telugu. This linguistic dexterity allows me to connect with my students authentically, transcending the barriers imposed by language.

Before we can cultivate a space of authenticity and shared trust through writing, we must navigate through layers of societal constructs: the hegemony of English, the vast socio economic divides, the enduring scars of gender oppression and inequities in how we treat people of color, caste and differing

sexual orientation —before reaching a space of authenticity and trust in the writing process.

We shed the veneer of English, with its intricate nuances and idiosyncrasies, and instead revel in the shared experiences that blossom in our mother tongues.

There were so many heart-wrenching accounts, and that particular year, the life-writing course became more than just a place to write.

It was a place for catharsis and closure, leading them to write about experiences of trauma and abuse, crippling depression, gender oppression, or the harrowing realities of days marked by cold, hunger, and intolerance.

These accounts are gut-wrenching, but they persevere – for themselves, for their fellow students who share similar experiences, and for the unknown individuals who may find solace in their words.

Through writing, they reach out into the void, offering whatever comfort and understanding they can. The courage these students demonstrate is remarkable.

They confront their vulnerabilities, transforming painful experiences into powerful narratives. Their stories serve as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the transformative power of self-expression.

Sharoon Sunny earned an MA in Humanities from the University of Texas at Dallas and later completed her PhD in ESL from the School of English Language Education at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India. She currently teaches on the English faculty at Azim Premji University in Bangalore. Sharoon is a teacher-educator and works closely with teachers who work with students from difficult circumstances. She writes about her experiences on various platforms.

You can learn more about her community-based projects with children from impoverished backgrounds [at her blog](#), where she frequently posts about early literacy and specific learning difficulties.

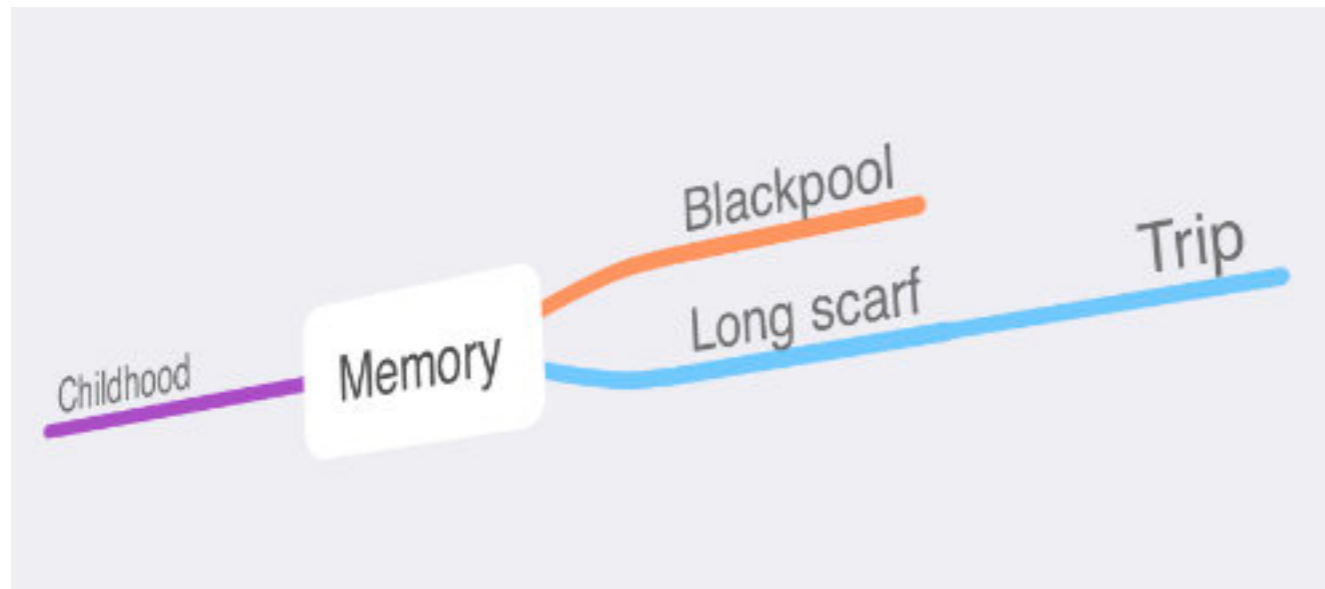
nawe

The National Association of Writers in Education is the only UK wide organization supporting the development of creative writing of all genres and in all educational and community settings.

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Creating Space for Creative Voices



DR SABRINA MEI-LI SMITH on teaching creative writing to marginalized groups.

Not only does a space for creative writing in education foster a cohesive environment, and tolerant community and allow for individual expression, but it encourages individuals to shape their own cultural identity. This is central to human dignity and growth. Francois Matrasso (2019) says "If people can't represent themselves culturally how can they do so in any other way, including politically? If people are only imagined and portrayed by others, how can they be full, free and equal citizens?" (Matrasso, 2019: 55). Creative writing in education creates a space for this to happen alongside the learning of core craft-based skills.

Over the past eight years, I've taught creative writing in prisons, homeless hostels, Irish traveller sites, care homes, university lecture halls, soup kitchens, African Caribbean centres, supported housing, Sikh Langars, art galleries, online, in church halls, woodlands, libraries and museums.

Workshop participants might have degrees in related subjects and many publications on their CVs. Equally, they are likely to be ex-sex offenders, dementia patients or victims of domestic violence. I believe everybody has the right to learn about creative writing - regardless of their backgrounds and identity.

Some of my creative writing workshops are for people who face barriers (of different kinds) when expressing themselves. As Matarasso states, these workshops are designed for those who "are not much

seen or heard in cultural space [...] Their presence in the media, on stage and in galleries is limited." (Matarasso, 2019: 36). Like Matarasso's ideas on participatory arts, creative writing's space in education is not results-driven and skills-based. For me, it's multifaceted. It functions as a way to give marginalized people a voice.

As a teacher of creative writing in community, Further Education and Higher education contexts, I've found practical, measurable, effective exercises which participants enjoy can be a challenge and time-consuming to develop. The first part of this article aims to share exercises. I will engage in the conversation of how measurable and evaluative activities can practically benefit participants and appease funders and stakeholders. After all, a space for creative writing in the education system can only exist, if it can produce measurable results.

For the past eight years, I've worked teaching creative writing on a Monday afternoon in an adult education college. Those who attend are people with long-term and debilitating mental health issues. This can be overwhelmingly challenging and rewarding in equal measure.

Creating a space for creative writing and community teaching in education still requires a degree of transparent measurement. I had taught English GCSE and A-Level English in Further Education and written for theatre in the past. My Monday afternoon class's focus was less on results and "teaching to the test". Softer class outcomes, such as improving overall memory, building a routine and developing a community of like-minded writers became appropriate for this subject and specific group.

Helping individuals with long-term mental health issues recognise and discuss specific conditions could

be an outcome in itself. I was mindful that some participants might not directly address what conditions they experienced due to personal reasons. Wording the outcome flexibly is important. One way that I found flexibility in my outcomes was to phrase it such as: 'Explain an emotion, or state of mind, using the technique of personification.'

I'm going to share one writing exercise which addressed this outcome and became an enjoyable and cathartic experience for this group.

I explained the technique of 'personification' (giving something that is non-human, human characteristics, such as: 'The trees waved their leaves').

I used the poem *Hound* (Mind; 2015) by Ben Wilkinson to show how a poem could (but not necessarily) be structured. This poem shows how a poet can personify depression with both human and animal characteristics.

I asked the group to write a short, unrhymed poem which personifies their mental illness. Then the most important step: I asked them to share this poem with the rest of the group. All did but allowing them the freedom to simply share the ideas is welcomed.

Next, I asked them to reflect on their experience of the writing process with three written sentences which simply answered these questions: – what do you feel? – what do you realise? – what do you notice?

One challenge that comes from teaching creative writing to people with long-term mental health issues is a lack of evidence of 'progression'. People come to my Monday afternoon class because they enjoy it. They build their communities and express themselves. Consequently, they do not want to 'move on' to other groups or courses.

Some have been attending this class far longer than I've been teaching it.

Ofsted scrutinises how a college "shows planning for, and monitoring of, learners' individual progress." (Gov.uk; 2019). This requirement forces the tutor of creative writing to consider innovative ways to document progress. This information could be harvested by measuring how confident the group becomes when interacting with one another.

I used an activity, with my Monday group, that was an act of co-creation. This activity monitors group cohesion as evidence of progression. Co-creation demonstrates active listening skills, memory recollection and note-taking while also strengthening individual friendships.

Here is the way I facilitated this exercise:

Individually jot down 3 memories from your life, I say. This could be (but is not limited to) childhood, work, friends, family, the changing face of your home town, food, shopping, music etc. Then focus on one you would like to share with a member of the group.

In a pair, take ten minutes to tell the other person your memory. Your partner will make notes in a mindmap form. Try to vividly describe the memory. Those who are creating the mindmap must try to capture the vocabulary and descriptions associated with this



Dr Sabrina Mei-Li Smith

event. After ten minutes, swap roles.

Now you each have a mindmap of somebody else's memory, create a short poem or piece of descriptive writing about this event. Try to use some of the original words. When it is written, share it with your partner and let them check for accuracy and details.

Reflect on how you feel now you have a poem / short writing dedicated to your memory. How do you feel? What do you notice? Is there anything you realise? Would you like a copy of this writing?

Co-creation allows capturing examples of the writing and how participants feel about the exercise. This can show how attending a creative writing class fosters a good sense of community and well-being alongside specific, taught skills around the craft of writing.

Although experimentation is encouraged, there are times when basic exercises can help with the core foundation of writing. Participants want to engage with the craft of writing and improve their style through craft-based techniques.

Importantly, offering sessions on craft will always create a tangible outcome, which can be measured transparently. It is useful to note that the goal here is not for participants to write in exactly the same way but for them to experiment with a framework. Often, evidence is monitored by those who are not creative writing experts. In this instance, SMART targeting is the simplest way to communicate what attendees have learned.

Often, writing descriptions, how much to put in, and how to use it effectively becomes a discussion point in all creative writing classes. As Bickham (1987) says

description is necessary but it can slow the pace of writing down and delay the movement that writing uniquely offers as an art form.

Consequently, a craft-based exercise can offer a core outcome, which can be evidenced and measured.

I have worded the outcome as: 'Use the template to write five lines of description.' This is easily evidenced by a photograph or a copy of the participant's writing.

Here is my simple template which can help writers who are struggling with description. I call it a *Recipe for Quick Description*.

I begin by getting students to think of a specific place they want to describe in five sentences.

I have used opening paragraphs from novels and short stories as examples. This can introduce the concept to participants by getting them to identify the *Recipe for Quick Description* before they begin writing.

*A plain telling of what the place is.
One piece of generalised visual description.
One piece of non-visual description.
A second piece of generalised visual description.
One physically small and precise visual detail.*

Although this template offers a step-by-step approach, it is important to remind learners that it is not prescriptive.

They can mix this recipe up by adding new ingredients such as dialogue, changing the order, or using action and narrative. The real magic comes from their growing confidence to experiment.

Teaching creative writing with marginalized groups in community settings.

My Monday class gave me a taste of what creative writing could offer to marginalised groups.

I was empowered by the astounding benefits of creative writing and developed an interest in bringing it into the community.

In 2019 and still with the same adult education provider, I took on the role of a Tutor of Personal and Social Histories. I was awarded a position on the project *Memories into Healing Words*.

visited care homes in Leicester and Leicestershire and engaged dementia patients with co-created poetry. This was a drive to make Leicester the first "dementia-friendly" city.

Memories into Healing Words required a completely different approach to facilitating activities and objective setting.

My biggest challenge was identifying how different participants from the Monday group and dementia patients, approached creative writing.

Unlike my Monday afternoon class, those in the care homes did not see themselves as writers – so I had to be the writer.

This action affected the objective-led style outcome setting I'd used before. Even softer outcomes had to be set (eg. 'recall one long-term memory'), which had little to do with the craft of writing.

'care home sessions'

To outline how this worked, a session in a care home always consisted of conversation to generate raw material for a poem or series of poems.

This challenged the notion that I had. I'd assumed that people who lived in care homes would engage with each other on a personal basis. This was not true but I noticed residents would interact with each other as part of an activity.

Vista is a local charity that engaged with *Memories into Healing Words* and is one of the oldest and largest local charities in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland [they] work with people with sight loss and their families for over 160 years.

As well as rehabilitation and residential homes, Vista provides specialist services for people with learning disabilities, dementia and dual sensory impairment." (Vista, 2022).

The combination of dual sensory impairment and dementia can make conversation challenging.

Working with Vista pushed me to think creatively about how to engage residents to provide material for a collective, co-created poem.

I approached a local museum that was kind enough to lend me an exhibit of household items from the 1940s and 1950s.

Armed with a box of brushes, hand whisks, medicated soap and shiny white toilet paper,

I began a journey into conversation and co-created poetry.

These sensory items, not only taught me about how people lived at this time but promoted a rich conversation about resident's memories.

Unsurprisingly, the shiny, white toilet paper (which I learnt was called Izal) promoted a discussion (and poem) that came with a lot of laughs. Here is Vista's co-created poem, *An Ode to Izal* (2019):

*The shiny white paper
wasn't better
than the daily caper
set out in the Morning Star.
It used to be
neatly cut up squares
strung up in the outside loo
and on our bares
did the newspaper
wipe up the stinky do's.
But Izal was superior
and Mum says: 'posh' and 'better,'
and if it got wet in the outhouse*

*could dry out and still be used.
Izel was our skid-proof paper
but when it wiped:
'Oh! Yer bugger!'*

Technical forms are not always correct in this type of writing (I know it's not an Ode but they found this title funny).

Personally, one of the major challenges of this project was the way it was delivered by a Further Education provider who measured 'success' on outcomes. The process, rather than the product was the main outcome here and this required evidence to be collated using forms not always standard for education.

The aim was to publish *Memories into Healing Words* as an anthology in 2020 and for every participant to get a copy they could read and show their relatives. Sadly, COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdowns (especially in Leicester) put a stop to this outcome for this project.

Despite COVID and the devastating effects it had on the demographic I was teaching, I still wanted to deliver creative writing workshops to marginalised groups.

I wanted to continue community work alongside my increased hours teaching creative writing at De Montfort University.

In 2023 I worked on a Writing East Midlands and Writing West Midlands project called *Beyond the Spectrum*. It was designed to appeal to autistic writers and was facilitated solely online.

Beyond the Spectrum's goal was to become a nationwide project and use Arts Council funding to deliver and establish their workshops. Within this context, objective setting is much more open, broader and less mandatory.

Evidence gathering could focus on process alongside creative outcomes as performance results. Those who led and facilitated workshops were less preoccupied with hard outcomes and the writing and participants could take centre stage.

I found that this freeing ethos encouraged me to think critically about which writers I was using as examples and how they could relate to participants' individual identities and lived experiences.

I used contemporary writers who had a statement of autism. The workshop I taught, mostly consisted of women with an autism and/or ADHD diagnosis.

Contemporary writers such as Joanne Limburg and Selima Hill reflected the neurodiversity, gender and experiences of the participants. As such, participants could see themselves as published writers.

Consequently, participants contributed to two anthologies of creative writing called *Nelson's Noises* (2023) and *Picking Out Thorns* (2023) which can be [read for free online](#).

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Write for "Writing in Education"

The aim of this magazine is to explore the work of writers and teachers in educational and community contexts. Its purpose is to assist the peer learning of NAWE members and their colleagues.

We invite NAWE members to write on the subject of creative writing in education - in schools, adult education and tertiary settings. We encourage you to think broadly on this topic and address any issue relating to the development of a space for creative writing in any educational setting. Please note, it is developmental work that we wish to highlight, not self-promotion. The next submission deadline is April 15, 2024

[Read our guidelines and submit online](#)

Contemporary nature writing and creative field notes



Lecturer and literary geographer
CERI MORGAN on using nature to
experiment in new fiction, non-
fiction, poetry and more.

'New' nature writing as identified by the 2008 special edition of *Granta* is, of course, not so new, if it ever was. The range of authors contributing to what has become a key trend in 21st century creative writing in the UK and elsewhere goes far beyond the model of the white, cis, middle-class, able-bodied male largely identified with canonical English-language examples of the genre in the twentieth century.

David Lindo, Louise Kenward, Jay Hulme, Kate Bradbury and Natasha Carthew are just a handful of the many global majority writers, women, LGBTQIA+ writers, disabled writers, chronically ill writers, working-class writers, and others published in the 16 years since Jason Cowley's edited issue.

Of course, as several authors and critics have pointed out (e.g. Zakiya McKenzie, cited in Yeo 2020), nature writing has always been produced by a diversity of authors, even if many of them were not widely known or recognised.

In what follows, I shall consider how examples of what I prefer to term contemporary (rather than 'new') UK nature writing inspired embodied, experiential learning on a final year university place-

The grounds of Keele University. Photo from [Keele promotion video](#).

writing module. This experiential learning led to a set of creative field notes that were later used by students as bases for poems, stories, or pieces of creative nonfiction.

'Writingscapes'

I have been teaching a place-writing module for final-year undergraduates since 2013. Titled *Writingscapes*, it brings together the critical and the creative, research and practice, echoing my career trajectory as a literary geographer and, more recently, a creative practitioner.

The module asks students to read and analyse spatial theory and literary criticism alongside select poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction.

Students write a short assessment on this material, before going on to produce their own creative writing portfolios, which comprise the main assessments. The module is organised around a series of themes, which do not necessarily remain the same from year to year.

One of this academic year's themes was ecocriticism and 'new' nature writing. Students read articles by Phil Hubbard and Eleanor Wilkinson (2019) and Sophie Yeo (2020) as well as a selection of poems by



Ceri Morgan

Polly Atkin (2017) and Elizabeth-Jane Burnett (2021), along with a creative nonfiction piece by L Lu (2021). After reflecting on what was understood by the term 'new' nature writing, conversations circled around urban and/or suburban or exurban nature writing, writing practices that question, challenge, and disrupt humans' self-claimed position at the top of the species hierarchy, and form.

Located in the Staffordshire countryside, close to former coal-mining villages like Silverdale and Alsager's Bank, past and present potteries (vernacular, artisanal and sanitary ceramics) factories and studios, and the market town of Newcastle-Under-Lyme, Keele University is an ideal location to reflect on understandings of terms like rural, urban, suburban, exurban, industrialisation, de- and post-industrialisation, and the pastoral.

Lu's piece on 'an unremarkable stream by an urban roadway' (n.p.) close to the author's home in Philadelphia resonated with students, many of whom walked or bussed to class along routes featuring similarly mundane 'urban (suburban, exurban) features' (Morgan 2019).

In the early years of teaching the module, 'natural' landscapes were popularly identified largely with the rural: since that time, there has been a greater recognition of, appreciation for, and promotion of, green and blue spaces in, and on the peripheries of, towns and cities (e.g. Public Health England, 2020).

Prompted by Atkin's *Jack Daw*, one class discussion focused on the challenges of writing other-than-human/non-human or natural voices as a human:

*Centuries repeating your own name in greeting
chyak chyak chyak
taught us the sounds
as best as our soft mouths could catch.* (Atkins 2017: 12)

Language and (not always fully successful) inter- and intra-species communication are key themes in this poem. Atkin's collection is very concerned with the 'more-than-human' (Abram 1996), that is, the interrelations between humans and other species.

Students and I considered the challenges of trying to write these interrelations without anthropomorphising other-than-human entities. Following close readings of Burnett's *Painted Lady*, *Dusky Sallow* and *Meadow Brown*, we began to think about form, including intertextuality, repetition and near-repetition, along with writing in ways that suggest impulse or reflex rather than motivation or mediated consciousness:

*I don't know what more to do than strike
out into what I love, over & under & over & out into what
I love, under & over & under & over & out into what I love
is the freshness, eagerness, insolence of sea.* (Burnett, 'Meadow Brown', 2021, n.p.)

A few weeks earlier, I had taught Burnett's *Twelve Words for Moss* (2023) on the MA programme and had gone to hear her read and speak at Birmingham Literature Festival. I described the book to my undergraduates and recounted how Burnett had reflected aloud that its hybrid form, which brings together poetry, life-writing, nature writing, and social history, seems particularly apt for writing about the kinds of themes within it.

Inspired by Burnett's work and words, and the close and careful attention she brings to her subject matter, I bought some jewellers' loupes – *Twelve Words for Moss* makes reference to the lens the author described in the Literature Festival as always carrying with her – and took them to class. Students were invited to explore the campus near the seminar room, and offered the following prompt:

Go outside and spend some time making observational notes. These notes can include details of sights, sounds, smells, textures, etc., as well as emotions, memories, recollections. Think about scale: like Elizabeth-Jane Burnett, you may wish to use a jeweller's loupe or magnifying glass to perceive tiny detail. Use these notes as the basis for a more polished set of (aestheticised, literary) 'field notes'.

I provided students with an indoors, stationary alternative prompt, drawing on an online workshop led by Anna Selby I undertook during lockdown, where we were encouraged to use internet resources like webcams. Despite the November dank, however, several students enjoyed the opportunity to look closely at tree bark, fungus, and other plant-life on the university campus.

The importance of embodied and experiential learning is being increasingly recognised in universities as well as outside them, as indicated by initiatives like 'authentic' assessments.

Drawing on S Nagatomo (1992), Mimi Sodhi explains, 'embodied knowing has been defined as not only knowledge that resides in the body, but also knowledge that is gained through the body' (2008, n.p.). Knowledge acquired via lived experience is as important as cognitive knowledge and, as scholars in several disciplines suggest with respect to formal education and training (e.g. Keune and Salter 2022,

Meaning and motivation: fostering creative expression in bilingual children

JULIA BOORE on whether writing for pleasure instead of studying grammar would help bilingual boys write more.



Julia Boore

I have long been an advocate that supporting a child to make (creative) meaning should be a priority when teaching English as an additional language (EAL). If you read, understand and respond to what a child has written, despite extensive errors in spelling and grammar, their face lights up.

Creativity and developing an original writing voice are, in my opinion, vital in helping children to become writers. The writing, on which they are so often judged (negatively), rather than on their understanding of what it is to be a writer, can then be improved with explicit, contextual teaching of grammar. A recent publication addressing EAL teaching supports this view that 'Meaning is paramount', explaining that meaning allows us to acquire grammar, not the other way round, '... we should clarify understanding and then supply the correct form' (Sharples, 2021: 32).

While working in a mainstream primary school with a bilingual population three times the national average, I embarked on a project bringing together my specialism (teaching EAL), my personal passion for creative writing and the current whole-school concern with boys' engagement in writing.

I was curious to discover whether a focus on creative writing/writing for pleasure would increase the motivation to write in bilingual boys and, by extension, improve their writing skills.

So the question I set was: *Does fostering creative expression improve motivation and writing skills in bilingual boys?*

I wondered whether moving away from prescriptive programmes and allowing children more imaginative leeway in what they wrote would have a positive impact on motivation, and if the pleasure to be found in making imaginative meaning would render them more open to receiving grammatical input to improve their academic writing level.

I felt really excited about this opportunity to engage in writing with EAL learners and see where it led.

While the project was intended to be enjoyable for the children, my question was a serious one, so it was

Carreon and Vozniak 2021), various knowledge forms should ideally be combined if we are to equip students with the skills to apply and adapt their learning, research, and practices to everyday life and work situations. Of course, the field note is a standard method in many disciplines, including geography and creative writing, notably place- and nature-writing, as suggested by the number of writers who have used this term as titles for essay or poetry collections (e.g. Evans 2015, Selby 2020) and individual texts (Cheng 2022). Interested in how some contemporary place, nature and/or ecocritical prose writers such as Robert Macfarlane (2012) and Jean McNeil (2016) use stylised field notes in their published works, I led an online 'field notes' reading group in summer 2021. For a few weeks, a couple of creative writing postgraduate students and myself took turns to suggest examples that we would discuss online. We also experimented with making our own sets of creative field notes.

COVID and Long COVID put a stop to this, and many other, aspects of my life, but I returned to thinking about field notes last year, during a Teaching and Innovation Project on Environmental Storytelling led by Pawas Bisht. Other members of the academic team include colleagues from Geography, Geology and Environment, Zoe Robinson, and Angie Turner, and me. The two-year project involves training in various research methods from the Humanities and Natural Sciences. In Spring 2023, I requested a session on geography-geology field notes, and learned how to observe and sketch (poorly, in my case) a particular landscape. The method aims to prompt a 'deep' engagement with place, and to allow the observer to identify what they consider to be the most important aspects of it. Field-note making place-writers likely adopt a range of practices, but even hurriedly scribbled notes taken in the moment can make for 'deep' or vivid reading when subsequently worked into a more polished piece of writing, offering striking details that help locate a text and/or a sense of spontaneity.

Writingscapes portfolios are only being submitted at the end of the semester, so I have not yet read the final outcomes of the nature writing class held in late Autumn 2023. In the meantime, I will keep thinking about how creative field notes can offer opportunities to give space, time, and voice to embodied and experiential knowledge forms in articulating 'more-than-human world[s]' (Abram 1996), in which interrelations between humans and other species are recognised in words and, hopefully, behaviours.

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She has published prose-poems and CNF in *New Welsh Reader*, *annie journal*, *NAWE Writing in Education*, *Forge Zine*, *Nightingale and Sparrow*, and *Geohumanities*.

Morgan is currently pursuing an AHRC Leadership Fellowship project on Québec's Eastern Townships, working with prose-writers, artists, and community members to make a digital literary map and audio walk.

motivation to write would impact positively on writing skills from an academic achievement perspective (in addition to inspiring children to write just for the sheer enjoyment of it), I also referred to the school's progression document for writing and looked at the European Endowment Foundation (EEF) *Recommendations for Improving Literacy in KS2 Writing* to inform my thinking and subsequent planning in order to target areas of curriculum English in which I would be able to have an impact and determine improvement.

The school was particularly concerned at that time with boys' writing so I looked at current thinking around this too. Mark Roberts in *The Boy Question* talks about the lack of motivation in boys when it comes to writing, exploring possible reasons for their negative attitudes towards writing and potential ways to increase their motivation, such as giving them more creative choice over what they can write (Roberts, 2021).

Following an invitation to participate in their lunchtime Poetry Club, I visited another local primary school. Although hoping to inspire the children in their poetry endeavours, particularly in using poetry to articulate their own experiences...

For the Poetry Club
She said, will you come?
Will you bring your words?
I said, I will come,
I will bring my words.
I will show you their beauty, their power.
We take up our words as arms
Not to destroy, but to embrace.
They document your truth, reveal what could be.
Find your best words,
Place them with care.
Tell your story –
Change the world!

...I found the Club gave me a valuable insight into children's motivation to write from their perspective. The club was set up and is organised by the children themselves and is very much about ownership of their own writing and having the freedom to be creative using their own experiences and interests as inspiration. I kept this sense of individual agency being important to children in mind as I took the next step in my project.

I identified a small group of bilingual boys in Year 5 (9-10 years old) who were 'working towards age-related expectations' in writing, and used National Curriculum (NC) and The Bell Foundation (BF) language proficiency framework data in conjunction with an initial writing task to inform my assessment of the boys' current writing skills.

With regard to motivation, I planned to focus on discussion with and oral feedback from the boys about their self-perception of their skills and their own attitudes to writing, keeping a journal of anecdotal evidence.

And so it came to pass that I implemented twice-weekly creative writing sessions (30 minutes per session) with a group of four boys, carried out over two terms. By the end of the project, the boys were still being assessed according to NC guidelines as 'working towards'. Did this mean their writing had

not improved over the period? Not at all, in fact this result was fully expected and I feel highlights the pitfalls and inequity of assessing bilingual learners against monolingual assessment criteria.

And, because of this, as the project evolved, I chose to concentrate on process rather than product and on turning the boys into writers rather than focusing on writing, although there were many teaching opportunities incorporating writing skills that were responsive to the moment, and I did a lot of work in encouraging the boys to self-regulate and be more self-aware of their own weaknesses and consistent mistakes so that they began to notice and self-correct these without prompting – an important step on the journey to linguistic fluency.

In the past I have taught writing via the standard format of looking at features appropriate and useful to the genre being covered, modelling the use of these features and setting tasks where the expectation is that children will demonstrate their ability to use these particular features. The focus is on the end product, has the child included a fronted adverbial, a subordinate clause, etc.?

'creative expression'

During this project, the focus was on the creative process of writing rather than the end product and on what you write (creative expression, communicating meaning) rather than how you write (grammar, spelling, punctuation), with the ideas as the starting point.

The EEF advocates teaching writing processes, e.g. planning, drafting, revising, editing, publishing which is also one of the key principles of the *Writing for Pleasure* pedagogy.

Teaching these processes seems fundamental to supporting children in becoming writers, and I believe teaching these processes via creative writing can be very effective because the children have more agency over what they write and understand that what they are doing is what 'real' writers do. Via these processes, e.g. editing, they can be taught particular writing skills and how these skills can enhance their writing and make them better writers, rather than the skills being taught in isolation first.

In her lecture at the NALDIC 2020 Conference, the author and teacher Kate Clanchy stressed that the more creative work you do with your students the more (grammar, vocabulary, etc.) they will learn because you have given them the incentive to do so.

Often, EAL learners have unequal access to writing because they are asked to write about things they have no knowledge of in a language they have yet to fully master. The initial focus for EAL writers should be on making meaning and this is much more achievable when they can write about what they know. There is a clear link between agency and ownership over your writing and funds of knowledge (Street, 2005).

Having agency over what they were writing resulted in the boys gaining more enjoyment from writing, and thus their motivation to write increased. Creative writing is very open to allowing this agency. It also follows that if the focus is on creating meaning, the

desire to write cohesively fuels the consequent natural desire to acquire the writing skills needed to help make that meaning.

This question of agency became integral to my understanding of how best to motivate bilingual boys to enjoy writing. At the start of the project all the boys were ambivalent about writing. They were asked what kinds of things they wanted to write about at the start of the project and all the writing tasks were designed to allow them to incorporate their own ideas, experiences and interests into their writing. This agency and ownership over their writing – which is easy to achieve through the fostering of creative expression – led to clear evidence of increased motivation, e.g:

- *When asked if they wanted to reduce the sessions from twice to once a week, the boys all wanted to continue with twice-weekly sessions.*

- *When asked at the start of the second term if they wanted to continue with the sessions, all the boys said they wanted to continue.*

- *The boys began to tell me of writing they were doing outside school, e.g. Ahmed showed me a story he had written at home using what he had written during our session on writing opening lines.*

- *At the end of the project all of the boys said they liked to write and had enjoyed all the activities. They were keen to take their notebooks home and were enthusiastic about writing in their own time.*

'more reflective writers'

Being able to incorporate their own interests into their writing improved motivation and in turn, writing stamina. In addition, the more motivated the boys were to write, the more motivated they were to revise and edit.

Motivation to be a good writer leads to a desire to make less mistakes in your writing which results in greater awareness of your own weaknesses and consequently more self-correction.

However, an increased awareness of what you are doing wrong could lead to de-motivation in bilingual writers and feelings of failure when comparing themselves with their monolingual peers, so there was also a strong focus on recognising their strengths and what was good about their writing. Looking at what they thought was good about their writing and at what they could improve helped the boys to become more reflective writers.

An important element of the writing sessions was talking and discussing their writing, sharing it with each other and giving each other constructive feedback.

Reading aloud their work and these discussions had a clear impact on helping the boys to address two important editing points from the school's writing progression document:

- *Assessing the effectiveness of their own and others' writing.*

- *Proposing changes to vocabulary, grammar and punctuation to enhance effects and clarify meaning.*

I noted that as time went on, the boys began to use the appropriate language for feedback and it was clear their metalinguistic awareness was increasing.

I learned that if you want children to be real writers, you must allow them to act like writers, that is to use the methods and practices that suit them.

For example, when learning about the process of planning, we looked at all the different ways writers might choose to plan a story and the reasons for these.

The boys then planned a story in the way that they felt comfortable with – this made them far more motivated to engage in the planning process despite having previously expressed a dislike for planning. This flexibility aligns with the idea of agency.

A fundamental element of the creative writing sessions and integral to the boys seeing themselves as writers was encouraging them to develop their own writing voices.

Over many years of teaching bilingual learners, I have come to believe that a bilingual child's writing voice is far more indicative of their future writing success than their current grasp of grammar, etc. The boys responded really positively to the acknowledgement and nurturing of their individual voices.

Once confident in their own writing styles, they were more receptive to learning and improving the skills that could enhance these.

Linked to funds of knowledge and closely allied to the idea of agency is allowing the use of first language and I incorporated the use of translanguaging (Wei, 2016) into the sessions where appropriate.

Luis (name changed) in particular benefitted from this. His language proficiency was the weakest, having been in the UK for less than 3 years, and this affected his writing fluency as he had to stop to try and think of a word in English while writing. I encouraged him to use the Spanish word and go back later to find out the English word, this meant he did not have to interrupt the flow of his ideas and was able to produce longer pieces of writing than previously.

While the boys were still regarded as 'working towards' and had a way to go before reaching the 'E' (fluent) band of the BF language proficiency framework, I feel that fostering their creative expression, giving them agency over their writing and showing them how to behave like writers gave them the confidence and motivation to work hard at improving their writing skills as they moved towards the linguistic and academic demands of secondary school.

'best practice'

Although what I learned during the project validated my previous personal thinking around best practice for bilingual writers, I was aware that my actual previous practice had been more in line with how I would teach monolingual writers, albeit

incorporating EAL teaching strategies.

I deliberately altered my practice for this project by starting with the bilingual child and their funds of knowledge and own particular experiences and interests in mind rather than with what writing skills I wanted them to demonstrate.

In future therefore, I would be keen to adapt, develop and improve a version of the creative writing sessions I undertook with this group of bilingual boys, incorporating ideas from some of the teaching approaches that I studied, such as the Real-World Writers pedagogy – which incorporates both the explicit teaching of writing skills with giving bilingual writers the agency over what they write about that they need in order to give a truer picture of their writing ability and allowing them to be successful writers.

This agency would be particularly useful in engaging boys who are often not motivated to write about the subjects presented to them, particularly when alien to their own knowledge, experiences and interests.

Fostering creative expression in writing is a way of teaching writing that is not overly prescriptive and allows bilingual children the agency they need to be successful writers, and in turn acquire the writing skills they require to fulfil the requirements of NC assessment.

I would ensure that understanding that it is the process of writing that is what makes a good writer is key, and would argue that allowing greater creative expression in writing would increase the motivation of all children who may be disengaged to achieve this understanding and improve their writing practices.

In addition, from an equity and social justice point of view, the inclusion of children's funds of knowledge in all areas of the curriculum, including writing, would deliver the message that all children's lives, cultures and interests are of value and worthy of learning about – and writing about.

Following this project, I strongly believe and would advocate that fostering creative expression in writing, which is greatly facilitated by encouraging children to write imaginatively about what they are interested in and know about, improves the motivation and consequently, over time, the writing skills of bilingual children.

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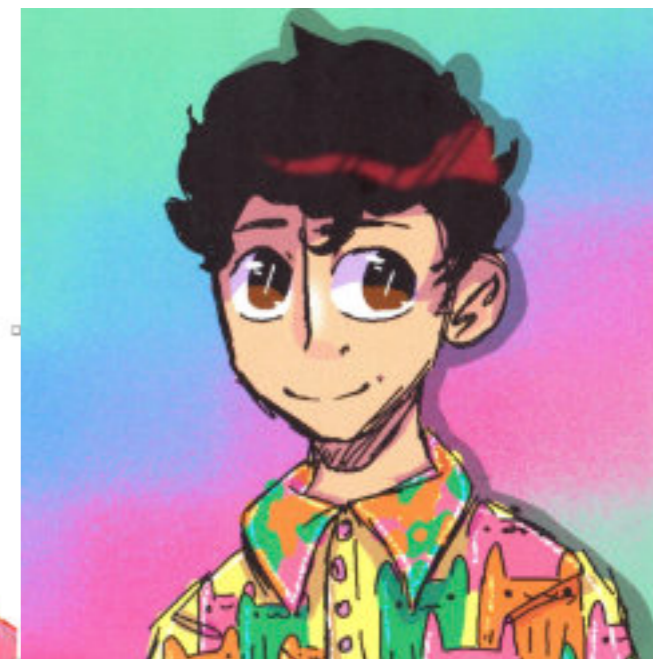
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Julia is an EAL specialist who has been teaching and supporting young bilingual learners on the south coast for over 16 years and advocates the importance of training all teachers to be EAL teachers in our increasingly multicultural school communities.

As well as being an educator, Julia is a former academic editor and is passionate about creative writing; she was recently proud to win the Stephen Spender Trust's 2023 Teacher Laureate Prize for poetry translation.

Reading Like a Storyteller



Storyteller CHIP COLQUHOUN shares advice for presenting your work to live audiences

My vocation as an oral storyteller began almost exactly nine years before the publication of my first children's book. Throughout that vocation, probably the most popular comment in the feedback from schools and event organizers was, and still is, "I can't believe you had them sitting still for so long!"

Many storytellers are thought to possess this magical art of enchantment, an art that I've known to provoke feelings of fear and/or envy from children's writers and educators alike. We live in an age where most authors will make more of a living from providing school visits than from book sales, yet they often began writing with the hope of 'hiding' behind their typewriter. On top of this, both authors and educators compete for student's attention against the growing might of a multimedia militia.

And yet, sit a group of students in front of a professional storyteller, and they'll be riveted within minutes – without a screen or even a page in sight, and whether they're aged four, eight, or eighteen.

But as I approach the end of my second decade sharing stories with live audiences, and leading workshops for others to do the same, I've become convinced that the secret to the storyteller's power to enthral can be found in a review I got from *Primary Times* during my stint at the Edinburgh Fringe:

'It felt more like a conversation than a performance.'

This feedback most neatly sums up the direction I give at the start every storytelling workshop: tell with your audience, not to them. This isn't just a key skill of good storytelling – it's the keyring skill, the one

from which all other key skills hang.

It's also the skill most undersung by those who see 'storytelling' as a synonym for 'acting' or 'performing', because, well... everyone can do it! Every time you share an event from your day with someone, hoping to help them understand your emotions and thought-processes... or share some gossip with another, hoping to provoke a reaction... That's the essence of storytelling!

A performer knows they've done a good job when the audience has been focused on them, and they receive rapturous applause at the end.

A storyteller knows they've done a good job when they detect obvious signs that their audience has engaged with the experience – for instance, immediately asking questions about decisions taken by the characters, the truth of the events, where the story came from, etc. All this shows that the audience are considering what the story means for them.

Of course, a storyteller's skillset often includes the ability to pull a story from their head to match the interests of their audience after just a short initial discussion, and will adjust the language they use to ensure they're being understood as they go along. But when reading to students, whether the words were written by you or another, your content is proscribed.

Even so, you can still make use of that 'keyring skill' of good storytelling – which, adapted for the purposes of live readings, can be rephrased as follows:

Read with your listeners, not to them.

To help you do so, I'd like to share with you five key skills to 'hang' from your keyring, which you can think of as forming your storytelling 'VOICE'.

V is for Vocal Adjustment

This is something you do all the time, usually without thinking about it. If you're concerned, you lower your pitch; if you're excited, you raise your pace; if you're trying to get someone's attention across a crowded room, you project.

For those on the receiving end, there's an almost universal unconscious understanding of what these Vocal Adjustments mean. Someone speaks to you with a lower pitch than usual? We want to know what's wrong. Someone's speaking too fast? We want them to slow down so we can understand what's got them so excited. A loud voice cuts across a great distance? We turn to look, checking whether it's our attention they want.

So if all this nuance of language can be transmitted automatically, you can be sure of enhancing your reading by putting just a little thought into it in advance. When reading a passage, consider how it's making you feel. How would you adjust your voice if trying to convey that same feeling? Try reading the passage out loud with that same Vocal Adjustment, and you'll share the same emotion with your listeners.

You can apply this approach to characters in a story, too. What emotion is the character feeling? How would you adjust your voice to convey such a feeling? Read their dialogue with that same Vocal Adjustment, and all your listeners will feel a greater understanding of the character.

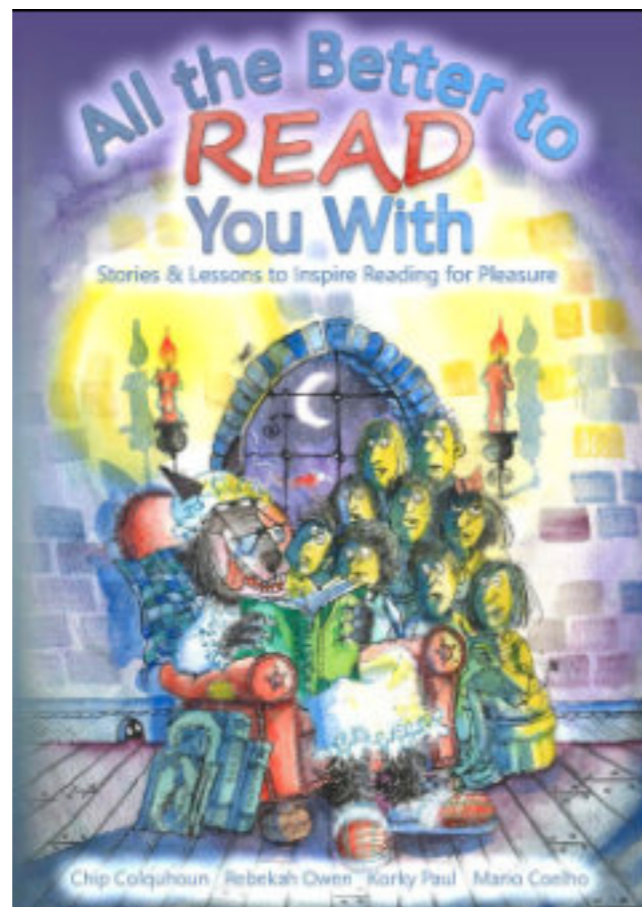
Adjusting for emotion is far more powerful than attempting to adjust for gender, accent, species, etc. Yes, those sorts of vocal adjustments can be fun to listen to. But chances are your listeners won't hear those sorts of vocal techniques and be drawn further into the story. Instead, they'll observe you performing those voices, and be impressed at your talent.

In other words, adjusting your vocals is not the same as 'doing all the voices'. The latter makes you the object of attention. Vocal Adjustments designed around emotion cause a creative response within the mind of the listener, as they imagine how the characters are feeling, or get a better sense of the action taking place.

There is one advantage to changing your voice to match a specific character, though: clarity. Your listeners may get a quicker idea of who's speaking when if you have distinct voices for different characters. Can you achieve this clarity without drawing too much attention to yourself?

Here are my three favourite solutions to this conundrum. First, don't let the voice differ too much from your own. Never underestimate the impact a slight change in pitch, speed, or volume can make, especially when combined with consistency. If your listeners hear your voice always raise in pitch slightly when you deliver the dialogue of a mouse, for example, they will quickly come to associate that voice with the mouse.

The second solution makes use of the Indication skill I'll share a little later in this article: change your physical position for each character. Again, this needn't be anything too complicated; I'm not



[Buy Chip Colquhoun's latest book](#)

suggesting you scrunch yourself up into as small a space as possible when reading the words of that mouse. You need only sag a little to your right when reading as the mouse, then straighten up to your left when reading as a character replying to that mouse.

Consistency is the key: if you're always in the same position whenever you read the mouse's lines, your listeners will always associate that position with that character.

The final solution, though, combines Vocal Adjustment with the Conversation skill discussed later in this article: ask your listeners how they think the character should sound. This is an especially engaging option, because it is a perfect example of that keyring skill: read with your learners, not to them. Not only will this option help your listeners distinguish between characters, but it will help them care more about the story too.

'O' is for Openings

If you're confident that your listeners will predict the next word, then preceding it with the inflexion of a question mark, along with a slight pause, can prompt them to say it for (or with) you.

Doing this gives you an opportunity to confirm the engagement of your listeners – but not just for you. When they hear themselves providing the right response, they'll recognize their own engagement. This will give rise to a 'feedback loop': hearing themselves engaging with the tale will encourage them to engage even more.

Once your listeners are familiar with your use of this technique, though, it can be fun to play around with it, and provide an Opening when, in fact, the next word is not what you'd expect. The fact that they still make an attempt is proof of their engagement – but the gasp, laughter, or other sounds of surprise or delight will again create that feedback loop.

Be careful not to overuse this technique, though. A reading with too many Openings can become tedious, especially if the listeners haven't yet become acquainted enough with the tale to accurately predict what's coming, or they're never allowed to be right.

I is for Indication

Let's say you're listening to someone telling a story about a spider. They say, 'This story is about a very small creature...' – and, at the same time, hold out a closed hand that isn't quite a fist. They look at their hand, and add, '...who was actually...'

Slowly, they open their fingers, palm towards the ceiling.

'...a spider,' they finish.

In that moment, what are you imagining to be in their hand?

Even without the presence of an actual arachnid, the storyteller's gesture has guided your imagination to create an Indication of one. And if the listeners are creating, they're investing in the experience of the story – which is the very definition of engagement.

Indication works best when it combines three core elements...

a physical gesture (e.g. a hand held out);

a suggestion of mass (e.g. by not fully closing the hand);
and

the teller's sight line (e.g. looking at their hand).

Of these, item 3 is the most important. If you look up as if you're seeing an elephant and declare, 'The elephant stood up!' then your audience will be more convinced that you are indicating an elephant standing up.

That, in turn, will encourage them to envision the same – even though you haven't used a physical gesture, nor given any suggestion of mass.

Item 2 is perhaps the most subtle of the ingredients, but a powerful one nonetheless. If you hold up a completely closed fist, how could anyone imagine a spider actually waiting safely in your palm for your revelation? How could they believe you're holding an apple, a sword, a rope, or anything else?

It is under the heading of Indication that I also include the use of pictures, props, puppets, or even volunteers. In all these cases, you can only ever give an indication of what's happening in the story, because the world of the story is ultimately and entirely in the heads of your listeners – but such tools can be useful in specific situations.

For example, if you're about to tell a story about a camel to a group of young students who may not know what a camel is, showing a picture of a camel before you begin will help them imagine the story.

Never forget, though, that the goal is always to let your audience focus mainly on the story playing out inside their minds, rather than the world around them – so the more you require them to invest their imagination, the more they'll remain engaged with the story.

C is for Conversation

This is the most direct example of reading with your listeners. As you go through the story, invite your listeners to comment on it, say what they think is about to happen, what they would do in a similar situation, etc. There is quite simply no method of confirming and compounding the engagement of your audience than this.

Conversation needn't just be about the story. It can also cover the telling of the story. As already mentioned, you can ask your listeners to suggest how a character might sound. You can ask them how they think the environment should sound (see below).

You could even ask them if there's anything they'd like to do to feel more involved in the story, such as turning up the lights so they can see you more easily – or turning them down for a spooky story...

There are two important factors to consider when using this technique. The first is to avoid giving your audience any suggestion of control over the story. Instead of asking, 'What happens next?' your question should be, 'What do you think will happen next?' Such avoids the potential of engagement-busting disappointment when you read on to reveal an action which contradicts your listener's suggestion. If all you invited was their thoughts, you can legitimately move on with the words, 'Shall we find out?'

The second factor to consider is knowing when to move on. Don't lose sight of the fact that you're telling a story – and you need time to finish it!

Keep those factors in mind, though, and Conversation may be the most powerful key skill on your keyring.

Environment

This final technique is the easiest form of audience participation: inviting your listeners to create the Story Environment with you.

This can mean the look and/or feel of the location where you're sharing your stories. Asking your students to create decorations for a 'story space' is a powerful method for increasing their interest in the use of that space.

But a big part of the Story Environment is in fact your listeners themselves – so why not use them?

For example, you read that a wind is blowing through the trees. Why not invite your listeners to make the sound of that breeze? By contributing to the atmosphere of the story, they'll feel further invested in

it. Don't worry about silencing them afterwards, either. Just continue to read, raising your voice ever so slightly if needed, and you'll soon find that your listeners quieten down naturally in order to discover the action that takes place in the setting they helped establish.

Letting listeners join in with repeated phrases can also add to the Story Environment. When they join in with a refrain, they get that 'feedback loop' on their engagement again: they hear that they've learned a piece of the story, confirming that they paid some attention – and so they pay even more.

One of the reasons refrains are a great form of Environment participation is that you'll likely find you don't need to invite your listeners to join in. In fact, sometimes issuing that invitation can break engagement; they're forced out of the world of the story to consider an instruction from a person sitting in front of them.

When you first encounter a refrain, boldly perform an action you've prepared. The second time, add a slight Opening to the start of it (see above). By the third time, you most likely won't need an Opening, and most if not all of your listeners will be eagerly participating.

We All Engage Differently

To conclude this article, I'd like to share a very recent personal experience of the powerful and inspiring impact to be had when you tell stories with an audience instead of to them.

Towards the middle of last year, I was invited to share stories with the small group of learners at Hope Tree School, a special school for girls aged 8 to 12 in the area of Cambridge, UK who have "significant barriers to learning and/or gaps in their educational journey." Prior to beginning, I was warned that the students might be restless, or even get up and leave, due to feeling uncomfortable around strangers. I was also advised not to expect much audience participation.

It's true that this audience was quiet for the first fifteen minutes or so. But by the end of the afternoon, every student had made at least one vocal contribution, most had joined in with some Environment participation, and all were still there at the end with bright smiles and keen applause. While one or two had needed to get up and move mid-story, they had surprised their teachers by always coming back.

One student's reaction particularly impressed her teachers, though. Bethany (whose name has been shared with permission from her and her mother) was focused almost exclusively on a tablet in front of her for the first hour. Even so, she did occasionally ask a trusted member of staff to vocalize her responses at various moments during my telling, proving that she was definitely engaging with the story. During a break in the storytelling, this 12-year-old asked that member of staff to show me what she'd been drawing on the tablet – and I couldn't help but gasp...

Cross-reference this incredible portrait with my photo and you'll see just how much attention to



detail she has shown – even to the intricate multicoloured pattern on my shirt. Surely Bethany couldn't have given any attention to the story if she was busy producing such an intricate work of art?

And yet, she clearly had. As mentioned above, there had been multiple occasions when she responded to the telling by making a comment through that trusted member of staff.

In addition, the teachers were astonished that Bethany especially had remained present throughout my entire visit. This was a rare occurrence even with known visitors – so she must have been actively enjoying the experience.

Bethany's story is a fantastic example of how we all engage differently. A storyteller who demands that all eyes look in the same direction could be erecting a barrier to engagement, rather than enabling it.

Conversely, allowing a listener to relax and enjoy a story in their own way could result in far greater engagement than the listener is otherwise capable of.

But what about listeners who keep turning to chat with their friends during a story, perhaps making sudden noises or exclamations to the amusement of those around them? Are they engaging with the tale?

In my experience, and the experience of every other traditional storyteller I know, those listeners are always providing some sort of commentary on the story, or contributing their own sound effects, dialogue, gestures, etc. So why would you silence that? That's a clear sign that they're engaged!

Always keep this in mind: every listener will engage differently. Read with them, rather than to them, and this will help you consider how to adapt your reading in order to broaden and increase their level of engagement.

Then one day, perhaps an observer will ask you, 'How did you keep them sitting still for so long?'

Chip Colquhoun began storytelling professionally in 2007 alongside Amy Scott Robinson. He's since performed in 10 countries, presented Traditional Tales for the Oxford Reading Tree online, performed regularly at Glastonbury Festival, and represented the Roald Dahl Story Museum on ITV. He serendipitously lives in the former residence of Samuel Pepys, England's most famous diarist, up in Cambridgeshire with his wife Emma and kitten Tito. His most recent book is All the Better to Read You With: Stories & Lessons to Inspire Reading for Pleasure, co-authored with Rebekah Owen and published by Epic Tales.

Book Reviews

Edited by MATTHEW TETT

Desolate and hopeful stories



Taylor, Jonathan. *Scablands and Other Stories*. Salt Publishing, 2023. ISBN: 9781784632946, 136 pages, £9.99, paperback

If, like me, you love a new collection of short fiction, Jonathan Taylor's *Scablands* fits the bill. In this book of 20 stories, Taylor takes readers on different journeys—often, these are pretty grim, though, journeys to places that are desolate, have been depleted of resources, but there are hopeful tales here as well. Its pocket-sized format is perfect for dipping into on your own journeys.

The collection opens with 'A Sentimental Story'—a beautiful tale about Eleanor, a woman who offers passers-by a hug, for £2.00, or a kiss, for £5.00. Despite the cheapness of such affections, this is a thought-provoking tale with an ending that resonates long after it has finished. Less uplifting, but similarly inventive, is 'Staring Girl'. Here, we have an encounter with a bullied girl who has a connection with 'the girl who would grow up to become a famous horror writer'. Linked to the genre of horror is 'Not a Horror Story'—the owner of a house wishes

her new home to feel creepy, almost as if she is longing for it to be what she imagines. Clearly, Taylor is very adept at sophisticated approaches to his short fiction. The formatting of 'Zoe K', in the form of diary entries, reinforces this, although I am not too convinced by the psychiatrist taking on the patient's traits, with the role-reversal being the key focus here.

In 'You Keep It', there is definite humour pervading the darkness. Taylor describes a neglected part of town, with many different types of shops, from those that are 'boarded-up' through to a brothel—named 'A Pound of Flesh'—with a 'For Sale' sign in the window. Taylor comments that it was as if '... even sex had gone bankrupt in this town', such was the lack of interest in this place, along with so many other sad businesses.

There is some clunky dialogue, although it is essentially about a son and his mother side-stepping truths about each other's lives, therefore awkward, cliché dialogue could well be par for the course. In 'Till Life', the confessional style ties in well with the setting—that is, a day in the life of a girl who works in a shop.

The play on words in the title links to the mundane existence the narrator has, from starting work in the morning through to the final entry at 3.59pm.

Jonathan Taylor really knows how to zoom in on the lives of many different people—essentially, people from different walks of life, but largely overshadowed by places, physical locations, that have seen better days. Females are brought to the fore in 'Outside the Circle—a story where the characters immerse themselves in solidarity, as they share a spliff and the word 'mong' is part of their vernacular.

The language is quite gratuitous but is representative of the characters who have a certain disinterest in their own lives. This is similar in 'Fleeced' where Lisa, a prostitute, sets out to document her life. Clearly, she is impoverished and apathetic, and not even particularly interested in the man who is paying her.

One of the most successful elements of Taylor's tales is the way he immerses himself into people's lives—lives that, perhaps, we would not otherwise know about. In 'Trial' the diary entries (something that the writer does in other stories, too) show a patient confessing their true feelings to a doctor. In 'He never writes to me no more', we are part of a sad tale where a child's grandma, evidently suffering with Alzheimer's disease, is no longer able to organise her memories or thoughts. Referring to her husband ('... he's been dead for fifty years') is the focus of the tale. Grandma repeatedly states how 'He never writes to me no more' and we learn how her husband was killed in Korea. Bringing it to the present day, the narrator states 'It's 2004, Grandma. We've got iPods. And texting, so you don't need letters.'

Yes, this is the grim reality, but perhaps not helpful for grandma, although it does highlight the horrific nature of memory loss and how all sense of what is real and what is not dissolves, much like how such horrible diseases affect the brain.

Some of the stories here are particularly short, such as one towards the end: 'Changelessness'. Here, we have a sad tale about early-morning feelings, how things

can be so desolate and miserable at ‘3 A.M.’ with ‘... three hours of wide-eyed insomnia’. ‘Tell me what you know’ and ‘High Dependency’ are also brief. In the latter story, Taylor writes sparingly, but repetitively, about the sheer raw nature of how life is for those affected by a hospital stay. In the final story, titular ‘Scablands’, which is also the longest, we are immersed into a school setting, a tale that opens with the threatening ‘I’ll cane you, boy.’

There is more to it, though—specifically that Taylor shows readers how life can be for people in close-knit communities.

Scablands is an accomplished collection about people who are dealing with a lot in their lives, as many of us are. There is an element of real life here, the gritty ins and outs of what people have to endure.

For this reason, if no other, it is a perfect addition to a short story lover’s bookshelf.

Matthew Tett

[Buy Scablands and Other Stories](#)

Tender perception

Rowe, P. and Wilkinson, AJ. *Vestige*, Maytree Press, 2023. ISBN 9-781913-508357, paperback, £12.00

The elderly woman’s head is bowed, pink scalp showing through white hair. The photograph gives us only this glimpse of its subject; behind her, a blurred brick wall suggests the shape of a cross.

Alongside this striking image is Pauline Rowe’s

poem, ‘Crown’, which speculates, ‘Perhaps she’s the cousin / of the mother of God / her veil fallen / in a moment of divine grace’. And later, ‘Perhaps she’s Mary herself, / hair snow white with shock / at seeing him crucified.’

Such perceptive tenderness is the hallmark of this moving collection, a collaboration between poet Rowe, associate writer with Liverpool’s Open Eye Gallery and Royal Literary Fund Fellow at the University of Chester, and photographer AJ Wilkinson. Everyday objects offer no respite from pain: a finely lit photograph of a satsuma on an old wooden tray illustrates ‘It all Starts with Light’, whose final lines, ‘wax coat and flesh, / sharp rind and sweet juice— / the promise broken once desire sets in’ echo the melancholy that pervades this slim book.

The title poem, ‘Vestige’, is illustrated by a blurry photograph of crumpled bedlinen: only the sheet’s creases are in focus. The narrator remembers, ‘...we were freezing / in the high rooms of the old Monkgate flat, / like old persons rehearsing a winter marriage.’ But the following poem, ‘The Unmade Bed’, points out, ‘It’s not a death-bed—there’s a rise / in the pillow’s pattern of resistance.’ Life will go on, despite the grief of loss.

The end of a long-term relationship was the catalyst for Wilkinson’s photographs, and the poems were written in response to them.

The resulting collaborative work was shown at Liverpool’s Open Eye Gallery in 2018. Rowe used three well known poems as source texts: ‘The Sick Rose’ by William Blake; Thomas Wyatt’s sixteenth century sonnet, ‘Whoso List to Hunt’; and Emily Dickinson’s poem 372, ‘After Great Pain a Formal Feeling Comes’. These voices, and their suggestion of

the dark and traumatic aspects of love, haunt and influence the text.

The nine fragments of poetry, and the accompanying evocative photographs, work in harmony to create an atmosphere of just-glimpsed, half-spoken thoughts and memories. In ‘Dark Secret’, the narrator admits, ‘that death did not divide us / flies like the guilt of dust / in sure speed of faithlessness / the lack of hold, all lost,’ and concludes, ‘life happens and happens to / destroy what once was / everything.’

This is an intensely personal project. The penultimate poem, ‘The Dead Rehearse’, protests, ‘I forget now, did you reject me? / Did I leave you? It was so cold,’ and later, ‘It’s as small as peppercorn. How little I desired you. / How rarely I remember. How infinitesimal, the pain.’ Yet the reader suspects the choice of “infinitesimal” hints at ‘infinite’.

The poem is accompanied by a photograph of a coral-coloured finch, staring beadily at the camera; but the bird is behind glass, and seems to be part of a tableau – which implies that it must be dead.

The final poem, ‘In the Clearing’, suggests that the narrator may be finding peace, as ‘Mist, a light-hearted child, / waits for the comfort of the sun.’

The shift in tone and atmosphere is emphasised by the accompanying photograph of a summer dawn: a green, tree-lined slope is caught in the moment of emerging from a blue-grey blur of mist.

The wish to ‘hold the morning air in my lungs / as a promise / of sweet pollen, / or prisms of sun,’ reveals the narrator’s change in mood. The pamphlet closes with the last stanzas echoing in the reader’s mind: ‘I find my shoeless feet / against the ground / learn to walk against / the bluster of the wind.’

The pamphlet’s final image, of a circular puddle filled with oily water, reveals the water’s surface to be a facsimile of the globe, the darker swirls creating the illusion of continents.

With this elegant collaboration, Rowe and Wilkinson have created a singular world of precise intent, simultaneously private and inviting; mysterious and revealing.

Sarah Hegarty

Sarah’s novel-in-progress was longlisted for the 2022 Grindstone Literary Prize.

Her short fiction has been published by Msexia, Cinnamon Press and the Mechanics’ Institute Review. Her short story The Ishtar Pin was a finalist in the 2021 Manchester Fiction Prize. She has an MA in Creative Writing from the University of Chichester.

www.sarahhegarty.co.uk

[Buy Vestige](#)

Painstaking research



Hayes, Paul. *Pull To Open: 1962–1963: The Inside Story of How the BBC Created and Launched Doctor Who*. Ten Acre Films. ISBN: 978190863084, 422 pages, £12.99, paperback

This is far from the first book that sets out to recount the history of how *Doctor Who* came to be created—but it should probably be the last.

For while it’s unquestionably written by a fan of the show, he’s a fan who presses at the kind of trivia long-term viewers know, and applies a more rigorous academic analysis than has been done before.

There is a lot of scene-setting detail of what else was going on in 1962 and then more in 1963 as the BBC was developing the show, but otherwise the book concentrates on what can be demonstrated and preferably proven from paperwork.

The author has done his time at the BBC Written Archives Centre, and it shows.

For one instance, it’s generally been believed by *Doctor Who* fans that the show came close to being a completely different idea called *The Troubleshooters*. Hayes knows this but won’t presume it’s correct.

So instead, describing the internal BBC memos that have this title, he identifies that it may not be a title at all. Based solely on the documentation, it’s possible that there was no title and instead *The Troubleshooters* were the characters that the memo then goes on to describe.

It’s quite painstaking how Hayes works to establish provenance over the title *Doctor Who* and key elements such as the word TARDIS. Plus, you can’t



vestige

Pauline Rowe / AJ Wilkinson

help but share the academic's frustrations at how key documents no longer survive and can at best be reconstructed only from other references to them.

Where it's difficult, but not impossible, to identify the moment when the character of the Doctor first arose, it's remarkably easy to specify the start of the process that led to the show.

Hayes is possibly best at these earliest stages and certainly at his most detailed because, for example, Verity Lambert, the famed first producer of *Doctor Who*, doesn't even get a mention until page 135.

The book finds it harder to end its story, though. Ultimately, it ends in December 1963, when *Doctor Who* was launched and within weeks had become an enormous success. You come to realise that there's been a decision that the book should become an account of 1963, but despite the 1962-1963 in the title, there is no sense of that structure until you're nearing the end.

So, it's a more abrupt, less satisfying conclusion than it might be, but since *Doctor Who* is still running six decades later, it's difficult to find a good point for a book to conclude.

Previously, David J Howe, Mark Stammers and Stephen James Walker's history of the show managed it by producing separate volumes for each Doctor in the show's long history of replacing its leading actor.

So, the same ground as Hayes' work was covered, in dramatically shorter and much less detailed fashion, by their title *Doctor Who: The Handbook: The First Doctor*, published in 1994.

That covered the show from its origins up to when the first Doctor, William Hartnell, left in 1966. It's a better structure than *Pull to Open* has, but Hayes skips *The Handbook* volume's detailing of *Doctor Who* episodes and instead uses his time to provide a much richer and absorbing account of the show's origins.

So much so that you can enjoy following the story even without knowing the show at all, and you can certainly admire the detailed research.

William Gallagher

William Gallagher worked for an entire week on the 'Doctor Who Adventures' magazine. He's also the writer of several Big Finish/BBC 'Doctor Who' radio dramas.

[Buy Pull to Open](#)

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