



# **(M)OTHER TONGUES LEARNING RESOURCE**

Developing creative writing with  
bilingual and multilingual young people

*"If you forget your language, you forget who you are." —Pupil*



Arvon is a thriving arts charity, celebrated for its unique ability to discover and develop the writer in everyone. A flagship of excellence, it has been described by Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy as 'the single most important organisation for sharing and exploring creative writing in the UK.'

Arvon produces an annual programme of residential creative writing courses at three remarkable houses in Shropshire, Devon, Yorkshire and Inverness-shire. Tutored by leading authors, the week-long courses offer a powerful mix of high quality workshops and individual tutorials, with time and space to write. A third of our residential weeks are with schools, disadvantaged young people and vulnerable and marginalised adult groups, transforming their creativity and confidence with the written word and improving self-esteem and communication skills. Since 2009 our (M)Other Tongues project has worked with bilingual and multilingual young people from across England who are speakers

of Portuguese, Yoruba, Somali, Urdu, Mirpuri, Romani and of French-speaking African and Caribbean heritage.

### **Grants for Teachers**

Arvon supports the professional development of practising teachers of English, who may apply for a special fixed grant of £200 towards a course fee. You will need to send evidence you are a practising teacher of English at a UK state primary or secondary school, or further education college. Teachers' grants are limited in number and can be applied for in addition to the usual grant if further financial assistance is needed.

For more information about Arvon's work with schools, see [www.arvon.org](http://www.arvon.org) or contact us at [becky.swain@arvon.org](mailto:becky.swain@arvon.org)

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For more information about the work of the Foundation in the UK visit Partnerships and Initiatives at [www.gulbenkian.org.uk](http://www.gulbenkian.org.uk)

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# (M)Other Tongues

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**Developing creative writing  
with bilingual and multilingual  
young people.**

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# INTRODUCTION

Ruth Borthwick, Chief Executive, Arvon



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“ The diversity of schools across the UK – in which more than 300 languages are spoken daily – brings with it huge opportunities to celebrate the rich linguistic and cultural heritages of young people who are bilingual and multilingual.

Arvon, the UK's leading creative writing charity, responded to these opportunities with the development of the writing programme (M)Other Tongues, which encourages young people to write in both English and their home language or languages.



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# PREPARING THE GROUND



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# PLANNING A PROJECT

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In this section we explore how to set the conditions to support bilingual and multilingual learners embarking on a creative learning journey. Much of the preparation is around creating the environment that will best support and engage young people.

The Arvon model is a five-day residential in which a group of up to 16 participants write, cook and eat together and work with two tutors, both published authors, who lead workshops to help the participants explore writing ideas, forms and techniques. The week also incorporates visits from guest speakers, practical workshops, one-to-one tutorials, time to write independently and the opportunity to share and celebrate each other's writing.

The stages within this booklet correspond generally to the structure of an Arvon residential but have been adapted for use within school or other settings. Whatever your situation, the exercises in this booklet can (and should) be adapted for the needs of young people at different stages of learning English and at different stages of their education. Equally, the ideas within the booklet could be adapted for writing solely in English or in a hybrid of English and home languages.

The activities suggested are based on the understanding of the value of creative approaches to learning and that learning through arts and culture improves attainment in all subjects<sup>1</sup>.

The approaches within (M)Other Tongues lend themselves to developing creative writing across the curriculum, for example, considering the subject of 'belonging' lends itself to creative writing across PSHE, Citizenship, English, History and Geography, as pupils consider – links to my life as a river and my ancestry. The form and structure of the exercises can be used and adapted, for example, to help young people structure writing around historical figures and characters' points of view.

Alongside using resources within the booklet, we encourage you to consider adopting some of the other elements of the Arvon model, such as creating an informal space for your pupils' writing or running all or part of the programme offsite. You may choose to involve authors, whether throughout the length of the project, at key points, or at one stage of the young people's writing. If you have capacity for only one author visit, we recommend getting an author involved during the vital 'generating ideas' phase. You could also consider crashing the curriculum for a week and involving all the young people in your class, school or group.

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## CONDITIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL CREATIVE WRITING PROJECT

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**Consider how you think about diversity, ethnicity and culture.** Four decades ago, a government commissioned report into the teaching of English insisted 'no child should be expected to cast off the language and culture of the home as he crosses the school threshold' (The Bullock Report: A Language for Life, DES, 1975, p286). 30 years later, Roger Hewitt's book *White Backlash and the Politics of Multiculturalism* (2005) warned schools' efforts to celebrate this "language and culture of the

home” could come across to the pupils in question as ‘a pageant of some stereotypical ethnicity in which they do not quite feel themselves to participate’ (p126). Behind this mismatch lies a misunderstanding about what ‘culture’ or ‘ethnicity’ mean for young people in diverse cities like London. The old notion of ethnicity as an essential attribute, uniting and defining all members of a specific community, is not borne out by looking at how people actually behave.

Working with pupils from diverse backgrounds, it’s clear a range of influences often coexist within the same individual, and new affiliations are spun from the threads of various cultural traditions. Pupils may well interact with more than one language or cultural tradition at home, and they almost definitely will at school. This leads to affiliations far more complex than the categories available on survey forms, and often goes hand in hand with speech patterns rich in borrowing, hybridisation and playful innovation.

**Consider how you are going to encourage multilingual writing.**

By allowing pupils to write how they choose, and legitimising the work produced, the (M)Other Tongues approach provides a space where these kinds of language skills can flourish. Pupils are not restricted by pre-determined notions of some mythical “language and culture of the home”. Instead they are given the freedom to explore and express their various repertoires in writing. The result is transformative, not because the “home language” is being used in a schooling context, nor because the “school language” is being used to talk about home, but because these inaccurate distinctions have been allowed to melt away. The activities within this booklet encourage the practice of using different languages in the writing process to enrich the texts being produced.

**Consider your writing environment.** It’s important to consider how you create and maintain a safe space for writing in order to encourage an environment in which the young peoples’ experience is at the heart of the process. This might include choosing group work over individual feedback. Group work avoids putting anyone on the spot and respects the vulnerability people might feel if they are writing about something deeply personal. The environment you set up should encourage respect for difference and working with mixed level ability groups. Many of the

writers we worked with on (M)Other Tongues found a way of allowing this exploration to take place in a safe and contained way, while promoting the idea of freedom of expression. They worked to promote spontaneity and battled hard to combat the 'Is this right Miss?' attitude so many young people are instilled with, devising strategies that enabled everyone to participate and engage, no matter what age, background or level of English.

**Consider how to best employ translators in the room in a multilingual environment.** Involve translators you work with in planning and developing your project and ensure where you need to you provide training, support and incentives for translators – their input will be vital!

**Ensure you are encouraging conversations about identity and culture.** When thinking about activities to encourage multilingual writing, there's a real need to work to young people's strengths and not force anyone to write in a language in which they don't feel comfortable. The group dynamic needs to be balanced in order for the members to support one another to develop linguistically and in terms of literacy, and also the facilitator needs to bear in mind the probable need for more scaffolding than is usually used.

### **Developing reflective practice**

(M)Other Tongues is as much a journey for the teacher, writer or facilitator as it is for the young people involved, and often involves treading new ground for everyone involved. At these times, it's essential to develop your reflective practice, constantly monitoring what works well (and equally what does not work well) for the young people involved, and how the young people interact with the different activities; an exercise which, in itself, may open new paths and opportunities for learning.

Similarly, getting to know your group and the relationship they have with their language is vital, in order both to chart their journey and to make a case for future work.

Everyone involved in the project should be involved in reflecting on it, from the teachers to the young people and any writers and translators with whom you work - the opportunities to learn from your experiences are many and varied.

**Adapting to the needs of EAL learners at different stages of fluency.** Although there are no magic wands for converting activities into ideal tasks for each fluency stage, there are some general principles which can usefully be applied.

### **I. Beginners to English**

The main priority for these pupils is that they feel comfortable in the group and therefore confident to participate in whatever way they are able. This may well mean that they are producing quite different work to the majority of the group, probably more focused on their first language. Any opportunities to get them to act as an expert in this language, especially if they can help other pupils, will be a great boost to them.

### **II. From peripheral to full participation**

Once pupils have found their feet and can follow what is going on in the classroom they will look to participate in mainstream activities in a similar way to their peers. They may well have a significant amount of vocabulary in English but will tend to deploy it in quite short phrases. The key for enabling them to participate is careful scaffolding of language. They need help to link up the short phrases they can produce into longer, more detailed sentences. This means using connectives charts and writing frames, highlighting the structure of sentences and texts to show pupils how blocks of language can be fitted together. Setting tasks which involve discussion in small groups will also give them a chance to practise their speaking and listening in a non-threatening environment.

### **III. Becoming advanced bilingual/multilingual learners**

As their vocabulary and confidence grows, pupils can appear very fluent in social or “playground” language. What they really benefit from is help with adapting their language to different registers and genres. They need to know the “rules” which govern the types of vocabulary and structures that are expected in different types of writing. Discussion is a key tool here, both after reading and before writing. Pupils need to discuss texts and analyse why they are written the way they are. They need to have similar conversations before writing their own texts to help them plan and rehearse the vocabulary. Something these pupils often struggle with is very culturally specific language such as expressions, metaphors and

key cultural references. Again, talking in detail about what they have read and analysing culturally specific features is useful, as is careful editing with discussion of the decisions they have made. Perhaps the most effective tool though is translation. At its most nuanced this involves reading with a fine-tuned attention to cultural context, coupled with rendering this in a different language. The increased potential for developing this kind of higher order skill is almost certainly one of the reasons why fully fluent bilingual pupils significantly outperform monolinguals.



“

I never believed that we would be able to do this, to make a play together of our story with our language. It makes me proud of everyone. —*Pupil*

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# CREATIVE WRITING EXERCISES

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## CREATIVE WRITING EXERCISES

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You do not need to follow the stages we have outlined in this booklet, though it is one option we believe works well. Equally you can pick and choose the exercises you would like to run from each of the stages. It is not necessary to run all of them either, though we have done our best to lay them out in an order that works sequentially. Where one exercise builds on or towards another particularly well, we have pointed it out.



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## STAGE 1 - EXERCISES THAT GENERATE MATERIAL

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Creative writing can be generated from a huge range of sources when working with bilingual and multilingual groups. However, it's important to find subjects and themes that will inspire and engage them. A good place to start generating material is group members' personal stories, identities and cultural histories.

When encouraging young people to explore their creativity, the (M)Other Tongues writers started by letting go of the rulebook that focuses on form, structure, punctuation and grammar and by doing so freed the young people to express their considerably powerful feelings and imaginations. The writers' philosophy was very much that enjoyment leads to excellence rather than the other way around. So, although initially relaxing the formal aspects of writing might seem counterintuitive, this approach can, in the longer term, encourage accelerated learning. As a creative writing facilitator you will need to revisit form and structure at a later stage, but for now the task is to encourage your group to think divergently and to be free to play with words.



# FREE WRITING

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## Aims

- To encourage freedom of thought and expression
- To challenge the fear of getting things 'wrong' and the need to 'get things right'
- To explore each person's inner world without censorship

## Method

Although it's not the activity you will necessarily start with, free writing comes into many of the other exercises in this section and it is useful to understand how to run a free writing session before starting any of the other activities.

Free writing is an excellent warm-up at the beginning of any session and if you are working with a group regularly it can be used at the beginning of sessions for your young writers to get in touch with their inner lives and their personal creative writer.

You might want to start by explaining each person has inside them a 'Creator' and an 'Editor'. The Creator is capable of generating infinite material on all sorts of different subjects. The Editor is the Creator's critical friend and tells him or her what's good, what's not so good and how to turn raw material into something better. If you like you can draw these two characters on a board or flipchart and ask the group to call out the kind of characteristics they think belong to each.

Once you've defined the Editor and the Creator, explain it's important to separate out the two aspects of their writing selves so the Creator has space to breathe, explore and express. If the Editor is given too much

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power too early on in the process of writing it will stop the Creator from getting started. During the next exercise if the Editor starts jabbering away with comments like 'You're boring and you can't spell', just ignore it or tell it you will come back to them later.

Tell the group they are going to write continuously for a set amount of time. Five minutes would be a good length to start with and the timeframe can be extended session by session. Depending on how the group is getting on you could ask them to free write for up to 30 minutes.

### **Rules for free writing**

- Keep both hand and pen moving at all times
- Don't pause to re-read. Similarly, don't edit as you write (which means no crossing out, even if you didn't mean to write what you wrote!) and don't think about spelling, punctuation or grammar. The aim is to lose control, so don't think too much about what you are writing.
- Write in whatever language you want. If you can't think of the word in the language you're writing in, but can in another, add in words from another language. The aim is to bypass your inner censor and get beyond what you think you should write.

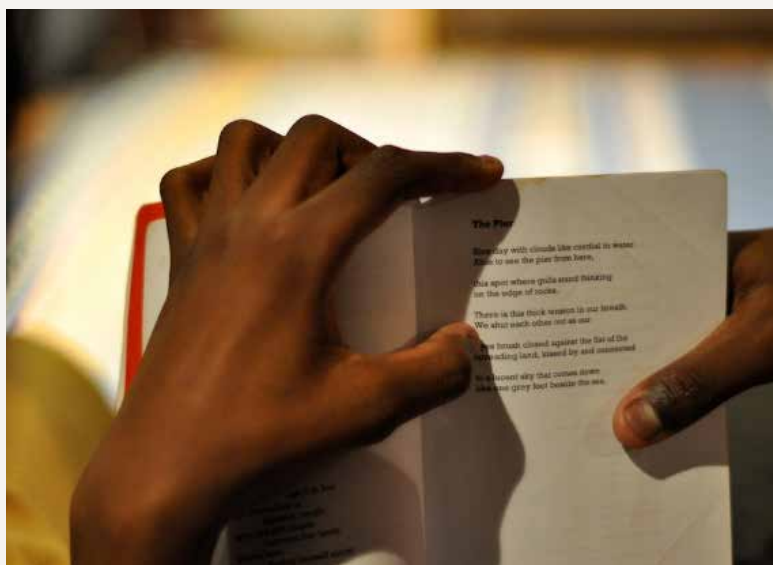
Free writing can be done as a completely open exercise or in response to stimulus. You can ask your group to write whatever is in their head at the beginning of a session or provide them with a topic.

Free writing can be a way into any topic you would like to explore (and could include memories, the events of the previous evening or day, a place that has particular significance to you, the start of something, the end of something, a relative, a teacher, an animal, or a street you know well – the possibilities are endless).

If you are running an extended writing project you could take the group for a silent walk and get them to write about things they saw, smelt, heard or tasted on their journey. You could also ask them to make a list of their own topics in notebooks. Whenever an idea for a topic comes into their heads they should jot it down on a special page they have kept for this purpose in their individual books.

Free writing can be shared or kept as a private source of inspiration. If you decide it would be a good idea for the group to share their free writing, start gently. Ask if anyone in the group would like to share but don't push anyone into it. If no one volunteers that's fine. If you are repeating the exercise at the beginning of each session as a warm-up you will probably find people gain in confidence as they get used to the process.

Once this writing has been generated it can be used as raw material to be turned into poetic form or shaped into a piece of prose. The chapter '**Exercises that Look at Form and Structure**' provides more ideas on how to progress raw material into structured form.



“

You see something else in a person, something they show you in their writing, and you think, now, wow, I did not know you could do that. —Pupil

”

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## EXERCISE 1

# MY MOUNTAIN IS...

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### Aims

- For each group member to introduce themselves in the context of their ancestry
- To acknowledge and encourage the expression of different layers of identity within each group member
- To celebrate diversity

### Method

- Ask each person to introduce themselves using the following sentences:
- My mountain is....
- My river or ocean is...
- My city or town or village is...
- My significant ancestor is...
- My name is....

Explain the mountain, water and place can be any to which they feel they have a connection. They may be connected to where they were born or another place they have lived or been close to at a point in their lives. They may be places that they have visited, that they dream of, that their family is connected to, somewhere they have enjoyed or somewhere they simply enjoy the idea of. They are free to unleash their imaginations and travel to wherever they feel drawn. If you are concerned group members won't remember the list, write the sentences up on a board or flipchart.

To avoid a sense of creeping dread travelling around the circle as you share, you might give each person the opportunity to speak when they feel moved to. An alternative is for each person to write the sentences out for themselves and share them with the rest of the group or with a partner.

You could explain this form of introduction is adapted from the Tikanga Pepeha of the Maoris of New Zealand, a custom and tradition that was handed down through time. In the Maori tradition we do not start simply with ourselves. As we travel back through time, our mountain anchors us; our ancestors crossed oceans and rivers to arrive at the place where we are now, then they bore us and so we arrived in the world. It might be best to save this explanation for after the group has done introductions so they don't feel the need to be too literal.

You could extend the exercise and add in other categories such as 'my passion is...', 'my home is...', 'the place I will write my grand opera is...' etc.

You can also develop this exercise by asking the group to do some free writing around each subject: mountain, water, place, ancestor, name and others (free writing is explained in the exercise above). Ask the group to do as much or as little writing in response to each sentence as you think they can cope with. They could write one descriptive sentence or else you could give five minutes for them to write on each subject. Round the piece off with exploring 'My home is...'

Once this writing has been generated it can be used as raw material and turned into a poem, used as material to create a character profile (possibly a character from a text the students already know) or used as descriptive material in a piece of prose. The stage Exercises that **Look at Form and Structure** provides more ideas on how to progress raw material into structured form.

“

All of a sudden you had children talking about things that they would never talk about in front of a teacher or even each other, it was totally liberating. —*Teacher*

”

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## EXERCISE 2

# MY LIFE AS A RIVER

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### Aims

- To encourage each group member to think of their whole life as potential material that can be used in creative writing
- To provide a metaphorical space in which pupils can explore life events at a safe distance

### Materials

- Flip chart paper
- A selection of coloured pens and pencils
- Post-it notes
- Stickers or decorative items

### Method

Hand out flip chart paper to each group member and put all the pens, post-it notes and other items in the centre of the room. Group members can pick and mix items from this pile.

Explain each person will draw his or her life as a river. The river can be expressed in many different ways: it might come from the mountains, be a small stream or a series of rapids, waterfalls and whirlpools. It might travel through forests or cities, through lakes and under bridges, out into the ocean or maybe even flood. Whatever is on the banks of the river can also be drawn. The post-it notes can be used to explain certain key points in a bit more detail. Any other decorations that you have to hand can also be used in whatever way the group members want to.

Give the group 30 minutes to do this exercise and ask them to present their rivers to the rest of the group. Ask questions about the things

you are curious about (though don't push them to say more than they are comfortable with). Encourage a celebratory atmosphere in which everyone's experience is valid and worthy of attention.

This exercise can be adapted by introducing a theme such as school, love or family and by getting the group to draw rivers that represent that particular aspect of their lives. Explain the rivers are a vast resource that can be used in the young people's creative writing. The experiences that make up their lives are the most fertile ground for possible writing.

To progress the exercise you could ask each person to choose one point in their rivers to write about. Give them five or ten minutes to do a free-write around this experience (free writing is explained in more detail at the beginning of this Stage).

You can return to the rivers as a source of material many times and in many different ways. It's a great introductory exercise from which you can leap forward to many others in this booklet.

Alternatively, if you are developing a story from the point of view of a character you already know from history, or an English text, you could start off by drawing their life or their story as a river. This is also a great alternative to writing for young people with very little English.

“

One girl had missed an anaphoric poem paying tribute to her mother. Another had written a poem for her hero: she wanted to finish her text by writing a narrative short story using Lingala, French and English words. In short, I was amazed by their creativity, their dedication and their hard work. —Writer

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## DISCUSSING CULTURAL IDENTITY

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During the (M)Other Tongues programme, a group of girls from a single cultural background were given a rare space in which they could express thoughts and feelings not only around their cultural identity but also their gender identity. As a result it was tremendously effective and provided a vital arena for the girls to talk about things in a way they may not have been able to under other circumstances, as well as providing fertile ground for future creative writing.

This kind of frank discussion may be difficult to replicate in environments in which young people are from a variety of different cultural backgrounds and of mixed gender but with a bit of careful group building in advance, it could still work. The important elements are trust and respect, which must be absolutely ensured before embarking on this kind of conversation.

If you feel there is sufficient trust and respect between the group, a discussion of this type could pay dividends in terms of encouraging a level of honesty that can be rare.

A discussion of this type might be well placed after the exercises 'My Mountain Is..' and 'My Life as A River'.

## **EXERCISE 3 - ONE WORD AT A TIME STORYTELLING**

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### **Aims**

- To develop spontaneity and get rid of the internal censor
- To demonstrate that stories can be generated from anything
- To overcome the pressure of having to 'create something' by working as a group

### **Method**

This is another way of getting in touch with the 'Creator' and banishing the 'Editor' and is an exercise that can be undertaken before free writing to encourage the group to be spontaneous and express themselves freely. One word at a time storytelling also interrogates notions of right and wrong. On playing the game, group members often feel as though the story is being told by an outside force.

The exercise is very simple. The group sits in a circle and each person takes it in turn to say a single word, telling a collective story as each person's word builds on the word before.

The first time, you will probably want to keep things fairly brief. A story that travels around the circle four or five times would be sufficient to demonstrate the principles of spontaneity. Warn the group they should start thinking about bringing the story to a close before the last round of words. Find an organic and appropriate place to call the end of the story even if it's not with the last person in the circle or you need a few more people after the last round to finish it off neatly.

The rules of one word at a time storytelling are:

- Say the first thing that comes into your head
- Don't pause
- There's no such thing as a right or wrong thing to say
- Don't worry if it doesn't seem to make sense
- Don't try to be original

As a prelude to this activity you could play a simple word association game.

As with free writing, one word at a time storytelling can be played at the beginning of regular creative writing sessions to practice spontaneity and to help people get in touch with the infinite aspects of their 'Creators'.

You could extend the game by playing 'one sentence at a time storytelling'.



## EXERCISE 4

# MIND MAPPING

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### Aims

- To stimulate group thinking around a given theme
- To generate words, ideas and images that can be incorporated into creative writing

### Method

This exercise can also be done as a pre-cursor to free writing. Alternatively it can be used to generate words, ideas, feelings, images and sensations that can be incorporated into a structured piece of writing such as a poem or short story. By working as a group, the pressure to create something is taken off each individual. Each person also benefits by hearing the rest of the group's contributions. Once the group has collectively brainstormed, each person is free to pick and choose words and ideas for their own work from the collective collection.

Choose a theme to work with. During (M)Other Tongues, the themes of 'home', 'love' and 'heroes' were used as starting points for a mind map.

Write the key word in the centre of a board or flip chart and ask the group for associated feelings, images, objects, smells, sounds, physical sensations and sayings.

Be prepared to ask questions to draw contributions out of the group. Keep things as open and as non-value laden as possible so everyone feels free to speak. If someone describes home as 'cosy' ask if anyone has an opposite word. Encourage your group to express themselves both positively and negatively.

To develop the brainstorming exercise into a poem, ask each group member to create three different lists from the overall collection of words. The way each person creates their lists is by sorting the words into ideas that seem to them to belong together. Again, there is no right or wrong way of doing this. Once completed, each person now has a collection of words that might form the basis of a poem. The stage Exercises that **Look at Form and Structure** provides more ideas on how to progress raw material into structured form.

## MIND MAPPING IN PRACTICE

One Arvon writer started by asking each individual in the group to name one thing they liked, one thing they didn't like and one thing they would want to do if they knew they couldn't fail. She encouraged group members to exaggerate and go as far as they could with their thinking.

She found young people often responded with received ideas like 'I'd want to be a billionaire' and so felt it necessary to interrogate these ideas further, for example, by asking them what they would do with all their money once they got it. If there was an interesting but half-formed idea such as the desire to manipulate time, she pushed the young person a little further and asked them exactly what they would do with the time they had manipulated.

The key word our writer used for their mind map was 'Superheroes'. The writer was interested in working with superheroes as an exaggerated version of heroes and felt the group would understand heroes better if they considered superheroes first. Ultimately though, her aim was to get the group to think of themselves and the people around them as heroes.

To get the group thinking about superheroes, the writer asked them to think about:

- The kinds of powers that superheroes have
- How superheroes become superheroes in the first place
- The struggles that they have along the way
- Different qualities related to nature that belong to superheroes  
i.e. Iron Man (iron), Spiderman (spiders), and Diamond Lady (diamonds)

When the group had collectively brainstormed their ideas, the writer asked them to undertake a free write that explored something they, or someone they knew, really wanted and were prepared to do anything to get. They were told to allow their minds to wander in and out of everything that had been talked about, to think and freely imagine, but to have the landmarks above to fall back on if they got stuck.

In her next session the writer played a lot of word association and rhythm games. You can find these games and exercises in the section on **Exercises that help with Reading Work Aloud** and then worked with them to look at how to turn the freely-written prose into poems using their understanding of line breaks and rhythm. You can find out more about that stage of the work in the section **Exercises that look at Form and Structure**.

“

I saw people in a new way, I spoke from my heart and they spoke from their heart, we were together, we were strong together. —*Pupil*”

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## EXERCISE 5

# WRITING A STORY FROM A PROVERB

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### Aims

- To generate culturally relevant creative writing
- To link past tradition with present culture

### Materials

- You will need to have gathered a selection of proverbs from countries that are relevant to your group

### Method

The idea behind this exercise is for each group member to write their own story based on a proverb they have either brought in or been given by the group leader.

How you allocate or find proverbs for each group member will depend on your group. If you have a mixed group and are from a different cultural background to your group members, it might be best to ask group members to each bring in a proverb of their own. Be aware however, some young people may not know what a proverb is or how to find one, and you may need to give examples before asking them to find one of their own. An older relative, friend or acquaintance is probably the best place for a young person to find a proverb. If possible ask them to find one from the country their family comes from and also to find out what the proverb means. If you choose this option, make sure you have a selection of back-up proverbs just in case your group members forget or are unable to do their homework.

The alternative is for you to provide the group with a collection of proverbs. If you run the exercise this way ensure you are clear on the meanings of the proverbs before starting the exercise.

Group members are then asked to develop and write a story that illustrates the meaning of the proverb. For ideas on working with students to structure stories take a look at the stage **Exercises on Form and Structure**.

## STORIES FROM PROVERBS IN PRACTICE

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During (M)Other Tongues the two writers undertaking this work set up a 'sitting round the camp fire' type atmosphere. They turned the lights down low and sang a song from Nigeria (this group all had Nigerian heritage) before handing around a bag of Yoruba proverbs written on pieces of paper. Each group member selected a proverb and read it out to the rest of the group. The writers asked each person to explain the proverb they had received and then where people struggled they helped to define it.

On this occasion, many of the group initially found the proverbs difficult to understand. However, with gentle coaxing and encouragement, the use of proverbs as a stimulus paid dividends.

Group members were asked to come up with a story that would illustrate the meaning of the proverb. Because the proverbs were Yoruba, many of the young people chose to set their stories in Nigeria. Whether set in London or Nigeria however, all the stories ended up being an engaging mix of the contemporary (location and characters) and the classic (plot structure and message) and as such worked incredibly well. Basing a story on a culturally specific proverb also paved the way for the stories to be written in English (most of this group were largely educated in England) but peppered with Yoruba all the way through.



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## **EXERCISE 6**

# **CREATING A STORY FROM A JOKE**

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### **Aims**

To use humour to:

- increase cognitive understanding of language and story structure
- establish rapport and social cohesion
- break down cultural barriers and build cultural affinity
- promote divergent thinking
- relieve inhibition and build confidence

### **Method**

Ask each student to think of, or bring to the session, a joke.

Organise the young people into groups of three or four. In these groups they take it in turn to tell each other their jokes.

Each group decides on one joke to elaborate into a story. The last line of the story will be the punch line to the joke. The rest of the story will illustrate the joke in more detail.

The group members take it in turn to tell one sentence of the story at a time. One person in the group is responsible for writing the sentences down. Give the groups a set amount of time and warn them when they are coming to the end of their time. When this notice is given, the groups must prepare to finish off the story, ensuring the last line illustrates the punch line.

If you have time, each person's joke can be given the same treatment, so everyone ends up with a story based on the joke they originally brought in.

As humour is the stimulus for this exercise, working in groups helps keep the humorous momentum up and allow the participants to have fun. Working in groups also takes the pressure off any one individual having to produce something 'creative'.

Alternatively, students can work individually on their own stories in response to questions such as: *When does the story take place? Where does it take place? Who is in this story? Who else is in this story? What happens? What does the character feel? What does the character say? What does the character do? What else happens? How does the story end?*

A way to progress this exercise might be for each student to create a picture book / graphic novel that tells the story of their joke. Students can either create their own drawings or select photographs from the internet to illustrate their stories.

## AN EXAMPLE OF A JOKE USED DURING (M)OTHER TONGUES

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Why did the monkey fall out of the tree?  
Because it was dead!

Why did the second monkey fall out of the tree?  
Because it was stapled to the first monkey!

Why did the third monkey fall out of the tree?  
Peer pressure!

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## EXERCISE 7

# THE SWEET SHOP

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### Aims

- To breakdown the creative writing process into small manageable chunks
- To stimulate memories of childhood, past and home in a safe, contained way
- To invite diverse histories

### Method

Ask the group to think about sweets they used to eat when they were younger. *What kind of sweets did they enjoy? Where and who did they buy them from? Who gave them the money? How much did they cost? Were they allowed to have the sweets? Who did they share them with?*

Give the group a minute to write ten words these questions have sparked in their memory. Be strict about time. The idea is to get past the internal censor and generate starting points. Ask a few members of the group to read out their lists.

Give the group five minutes to flesh out the story in more detail. Ask each person to read their story to the person sitting next to them. If there is time you could ask a few people to read in front of the whole group. It might also be possible to give each pair a few things to feedback on in relation to each other's stories to set them up for the next stage of the exercise.

In the final stage give the group 15 minutes to write a more fully developed version of the story, paying attention to the feedback they received from their partner and end the session with a few people reading out their edited stories.

## EXERCISE 8

# DEVELOPING A SEMANTIC FIELD

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### Aims

- To encourage greater imaginative range in language use
- To provide young people with a creative language toolkit they can use in poems, dialogue and storytelling
- To extend young people's vocabulary and academic register

### Method

This is a great exercise for lifting language from the pedestrian into the heightened realm of poetry. Remember poetic language belongs not only in poetry but can be used in both narrative description and dialogue.

Explain to the group each kind of place in the world, subjects (such as the subjects we study at school), the type of jobs people do, and even types of groups or all people have a language associated with them. For example, we use completely different words to talk about nature to the ones we use to talk about the city.

Lead the group in a collective brainstorm. Ask them first to brainstorm words used in association with the city and secondly words used in association with nature. Ask them to stick to nouns at first although they can also add adjectives to the noun ie. revving engine, loud horns. Nouns will work better as they reference tangible things that are dominant within the landscape in question. Ask your group to stick to words that relate to how they experience the field in question with their five senses. When it comes to writing, this will help the reader feel they are actually in the place being described.

The young people can also add words in other languages. If you don't speak that language yourself, ask the young person to write the word directly on the board or flip chart. If the young person is capable of a translation ask them to explain the word in English. This may throw up some interesting things as there may not be a direct translation into English, and the words used to describe Somalian nature or a Pakistani city may be quite different to the words used to describe nature in the UK or London or Manchester.

If you are going to use different languages, you may want to run the exercise 'Words in a Box' in **Stage Two – Exercises That Explore Translation**, as a warm-up, as it investigates how particular words relate to different languages and places. You may also want to try sounding out a few of the non-English words as a group to see how they feel.

Next give everyone five to ten minutes to write a short narrative description that describes nature using the language (or semantic field) of the city, or the city using the semantic field of nature. Ask a few people to read theirs aloud. Point out anything that works really well.

Ask the group for other locations and subjects with specific language associated with them. A few possibilities are listed below but you can ask the group to generate others:

The Body | Science | Business | the Beach | War | the Ocean | History | Baking | Love | Families

Ask each person to choose one field from the list you have generated. Give each person a few minutes to brainstorm as many words as they can think of in relation to their field. Encourage and support them to write in one of their other languages if that's what they want or need to do. Ask a few people to read their lists out.

Work with each young person to choose a subject that is somehow opposite to the semantic field they have developed. Ask them to write a short piece about this subject, drawing on the list of nouns they have created from a different semantic field. The subject matter and semantic field don't have to be direct opposites but it works if there is some tangible difference between them.

Ask a few people to read their pieces aloud. If anyone has used more than one language you might particularly ask them to read. Celebrate what works well and also the use of more than one language. Point out where the additional language works to add atmosphere and takes the person directly to the subject being described.

Explain this exercise has enabled the group to develop a new type of creative language and this language can be used time and again in different forms of writing. The young writers can draw on this technique whenever they want to.

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## **EXERCISE 9**

# **IMAGINATION STRETCH**

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### **Aims**

- To encourage the use of simile and metaphors
- To encourage writers to use all five senses

### **Materials**

- Copies of the table overleaf
- A series of nouns on slips of paper placed in a bag

### **Method**

In advance of the session prepare a series of nouns printed on pieces of paper. There should be enough for the group to have three each. The nouns don't have to be anything special, in fact the more pedestrian they are, the better. Place the nouns in a bag and ask group members to each choose three. It is helpful if each has two concrete nouns and one abstract noun, and to work on the concrete nouns first, in the run up into the more 'difficult' task of experiencing something abstract with their senses.

Once everyone has their nouns and before you tell them what they are to do with them, it's sometimes fun to give people the opportunity to swap

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with one another. This is particularly a good idea if someone has two or three nouns that are very similar to one another.

Give the group 15 minutes to complete the table (see overleaf). Tell the group to work as quickly as possible and to write down as many ideas as possible. Their task is to fill each box with at least five ideas. This is another exercise designed to silence 'The Editor' and encourage 'The Creator' to come forward. Keep an eye on the time and let them know when they are five minutes in, when they are ten minutes in, and when they only have one or two minutes left. Make sure everyone's pen is moving across the page constantly. If you see anyone getting stuck and blocked, go over and see if you can help to free them up a little.

At some point you may want to explain the thinking behind this exercise. A writer's job is to transport the reader into the world of the story. When we are in the real world we experience it with all five of our senses. This means the writer must create the experience of the reader being in the story by describing things with their five senses (the writer doesn't tell us it is raining, they make us feel as though we are actually in the rain).

Go around the group and ask everyone to choose one of their nouns and read out the images they have generated in relation to it. Once they are done pick out the images that really stuck with you and created strong imagery in the mind's eye. Celebrate these images and say something about why you feel they work so well.

Go on to explain how a writer might use these images in their writing (they might, for example, use the images as simile, metaphor or as a character trait).

Take for example 'procrastination tastes like a dry mouth'. This is a simile due to the use of the word 'like' (the sentence tells us one thing is like another thing). To change it into a metaphor we would get rid of the word 'like' and perhaps write something like 'the dry mouth of procrastination', or even just have a character with a dry mouth. Equally the dryness could enter the environment where the story takes place.

The metaphor might be extended into a poem or longer piece of narrative writing.

Like the Semantic Field activity this technique can be used throughout the writing process in all sorts of different forms.

	Looks like	Smells like	Tastes like	Sounds like	Feels like
Noun 1					
Noun 2					
Noun 3					



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## STAGE 2 - EXERCISES THAT EXPLORE TRANSLATION

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During (M)Other Tongues, many of the writers chose, quite early in the week-long process, to run exercises that used the idea of translation as stimulus. These exercises required the young people to bring their specific bilingual or multilingual abilities to the art of creative writing, putting them in the role of expert, while also creating a convergent relationship in the young peoples' minds between two skill sets they had perhaps previously considered divergent.

“

To be able to celebrate your culture you have to have your language alive.  
—Teacher

”

Young people, more often than not, are not used to writing in their home language, especially in school. Using a hybrid multilingual written form is a step towards the unsanctioned and unknown, even though it is the language of the school playground and is regularly spoken elsewhere with family and friends. Our writers found working with translation exercises sooner rather than later gave young people permission to bring their other languages to the table and to start considering the artistic possibilities of mixing and matching languages. Working with translation was also a fun way of enabling those whose English was not so fluent to feel their way into an unfamiliar language as well as understanding its functionality.

It might be difficult for teachers to consider running exercises that involve translating work from or into a language they don't speak themselves. However, this does not necessarily matter. The main thing is to remain confident in yourself as a teacher or facilitator. It's important not to feel intimidated by your lack of understanding of a particular language and to recognise the increase in motivation and confidence gained by putting young people in the role of expert, as well as the value in allowing small groups of young people who have similar language sets to work together and support each other (even with similar language sets they might have different levels of fluency and literacy that can be enhanced through peer mentoring relationships).

Taking the risk to run exercises that explore translation may feel counter-intuitive because you may not understand enough to be able to mark and correct young people's work, but in this phase of the process we are still working with the principle of releasing creative energy as a fundamental part of the process on the journey towards young people taking a more active interest in the more formal aspects of writing.

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# EXERCISE 1

## WORDS IN A BOX

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### Aims

- To make clear the different associations with different languages
- To encourage the playful use of languages other than English in creative writing

### Materials

- Approximately 25 pairs of words in English and the students home languages written on slips of paper
- Alternatively, you could use pictures that clearly depict these words

### Method

On (M)other Tongues, two of our writers ran an exercise with their Portuguese speaking group in which each young person was given approximately two dozen slips of paper, each of which had a word pair in both languages, for example, teacher/ professor, family/ família, cold/ frio, sun/ sol, yesterday/ ontem.

They put two boxes on the table, one marked English and one marked Português, and asked their group members to put each word-slip in the box corresponding to the language they associated it with. Some were obvious. For example those from hot countries living in the UK and undertaking this exercise in December put 'hot' and 'sun' in Portuguese and 'cold' and 'rain' in English, and most placed 'teacher' in English and 'grandmother' in Portuguese. However, the writers also chose words that were less obvious such as red, blue, yellow, yesterday, funny and scary.

The writers were surprised to find that each of the young people understood this exercise immediately and instinctively without much

explanation from them. They just got to work right away, this word here, that word there.

If you are working with a group in which there is a variety of languages you will need small boxes or tins for each student or boxes for each language within the overall group. Alternatively each young person could make individual piles of their own.

Once the words have been sorted into two boxes or piles, it would be a good idea to discuss the results. You might also consider developing a piece of writing from the words the group has grouped together under each language heading. This could be done using the different stages of developing a piece of writing described in the Section One activity The Sweet Shop.

“

I've learnt that I can be good at anything that I set my mind to. I never ever wrote poetry before. If I can do this, then I can achieve my goals.

—Pupil

”



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## EXERCISE 2

# TRANSLATING A PROVERB

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### Aims

- To breakdown the creative writing process into small manageable chunks
- To stimulate memories of childhood, past and home in a safe, contained way
- To invite diverse histories

### Method

Ask the group to think about sweets they used to eat when they were younger. *What kind of sweets did they enjoy? Where and who did they buy them from? Who gave them the money? How much did they cost? Were they allowed to have the sweets? Who did they share them with?*

Give the group a minute to write ten words these questions have sparked in their memory. Be strict about time. The idea is to get past the internal censor and generate starting points. Ask a few people to read out their lists.

Give the group five minutes to flesh out the story in more detail. Ask each person to read their story to the person sitting next to them. If there is time you could ask a few people to read in front of the whole group. It might also be possible to give each pair a few things to feedback on in relation to each other's stories to set them up for the next stage of the exercise.

In the final stage give the group 15 minutes to write a more fully developed version of the story, paying attention to the feedback they received from their partner and end the session with a few people reading out their edited stories.

## TRANSLATING A POEM

Two of our writers on (M)Other Tongues, decided to undertake a group poetry translation exercise with Lemn Sissay's poem *Gold from the Stone*. The writers read the poem to their group once without telling them they were going to be translating it. At a later session they then broke the news that the group would translate it together.

First, the group put together a quick literal translation into Portuguese of the opening stanza. Reading them side-by-side in Portuguese and English it was immediately clear to the students what was wrong with the translation - it sounded wrong, didn't rhyme and didn't have the same rhythm.

In advance of this session, the writers had also produced other versions of the poem in French, Greek and Russian and read these to their group, drawing attention to the fact that even not knowing and words in that language they could tell instantly it was the same poem just from the sound, rhyme and rhythm.

Then they worked on producing a version of the whole poem that favoured rhyme and rhythm over literal meaning, working together on two stanzas and then splitting into groups to do the rest.

Again, the writers were surprised to find the students instinctively knew what to do and came up with imaginative solutions.

“

When we did the river [workshop exercise], I had a chance to look at my life, to think about myself and all the things that happen to me, for the first time really. It changed the way I think, made me stronger to see myself this way. —Pupil

”

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## EXERCISE 3

# LOAN WORDS

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### Aims

- To encourage young people to think of English and language in general as hybrid
- To normalise the use of languages other than English within English itself

### Materials

- A photocopy of the resource sheet (overleaf) for your use as facilitator
- Photocopies of the empty grid sheet (overleaf) for each team

### Method

Organise your group into teams of three or four. Ask each team to choose a team name (one in a language that is not English perhaps - this may involve a group member teaching their teammates a word they don't know and is great for celebrating diversity and building cooperation).

Using a selection of the words in the grid below (20 or so will do) set up a quiz in which the group has to guess which country each word originates from. You could give the winning team a small prize.

To list their answers each group can use the empty grid (also available to photocopy below) you have given each team. Call out words from different parts of the world in random order. Play the game for 20 minutes or so, choosing a selection (but not all) of the words from the root language grid.

## Root Language    Words

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<b>Australian Aboriginal</b>	Budgerigar, Dingo, Drongo, Kangaroo, Wallaby, Wombat, Boomerang, Wonga, Yabber.
<b>African (Various)</b>	Banana, Bogus, Bozo, Boogie, Jazz, Jive, Chimpanzee, Okay, Samba, Tango, Yam, Banjo, Funk, Safari, Jumbo, Zebra, Zombie.
<b>Chinese</b>	Brainwashing, Ketchup, Gung-Ho, Go, Kung-Fu, Lychee, Long Time-no-See, No-Can-Do, Tea, Tofu, Tao, Tycoon, Typhoon, Wok, Zen.
<b>Czech</b>	Dollar, Pistol, Polka, Robot, Semtex.
<b>Danish</b>	Cog, Carrot, Flounder, Hug, Monster, Nudge, Toilet.
<b>Dutch</b>	Bamboo, Blister, Blaze, Blasé, Booze, Boss, Bulky, Cockatoo, Coleslaw, Cruise, Dock, Drill, Drug, Elope, Golf, Hoist, Iceberg, Knapsack, Mannequin, Measles, Meerkat, Rucksack, Santa Claus, Snack, Splinter, Tattoo, Tulip, Waffle, Walrus.
<b>German</b>	Abseil, Delicattessen, Frankfurter, Hamburger, Hampster, Kindergarten, Kitsch, Muesli, Poltergeist, Waltz, Wanderlust, Plunder, Neanderthal.
<b>French</b>	Elephant, Baboon, Dolphin, Chameleon, Squirrel, Lieutenant, Souffle, Caramel, Marmalade, Meringue, Mayonnaise, Lemon, Orange, Cabbage, Aubergine, Helicopter, Parachute, Dandelion, Machine, Lingerie, Toboggan.
<b>Spanish</b>	Albatross, Alligator, Anchovy, Avocado, Barbeque, Canoe, Caribbean, Cigarette, Cockroach, Fiesta, Guacamole, Hurricane, Macho, Mosquito, Negro, Potato, Stampede, Tobacco, Tornado, Tuna, Vanilla, Vigilante.



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Australian  
Aboriginal

African  
(Various)

Chinese

Czech

Danish

Dutch

German

French

Spanish

## EXERCISE 4

# LOAN WORDS (EXTENSION)

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### Aims

- For young writers to explore their own journey to the country through metaphor

### Method

You can develop the shorter exercise by asking group members to choose one word from their grids to write a story about. Alternatively they can use a word from the home language. The story is how this word came to arrive in England. The young people should write the story as though the word is a human character, for example:

*'Banana was a young, glamorous, beauty queen, from Maraka in Sierra Leone with ambitions to become Miss World. Her name 'Ba-na-na' was whispered softly on the lips of every young man in the village who dared to dream he might one day marry her.'*

You can undertake this exercise in a very simple way by giving the group just a few minutes to write a spontaneous story about the character and their journey or you deepen the exercise using the activity overleaf.

## EXERCISE 5

# LOAN WORDS (LONGER EXTENSION)

### Aims

- For young writers to explore their own journey to the country through a longer narrative

### Method

Give each person some time to come up with a simple character description or profile, for which you can use the exercise **Creating a Character** in the section **Exercises that look at Form and Structure**. Alternatively use the following key prompts.

- *Is your character male or female?*
- *How old are they?*
- *Where do they live?*  
NB. The character should begin the story living in the country that the word originates from, but also tell us about exactly where in that country they live.
- *What does it look, smell, sound, taste and feel like in this place?*
- *Who else lives there?*
- *What kind of house does the character live in?*
- *How does he or she spend their days?*
- *How does the character feel about their looks, lifestyle, home, family?*
- *What does the character most want or desire? (and how does this relate to their eventual travel overseas? The writer should have some idea about what is most important to the character in order to lay the seeds of the story)*
- *What are their specific character traits?*
- *How does the character express love to those they most care about?*  
Consider the limitations of your character's loyalty to the people they care about. In what kind of situation would they be moved to betray these people?

Give the group members 15 – 20 minutes to write a character profile as a piece of narrative in the third person. Encourage them to write about their character in a way that means the reader can see, hear and touch them.

If they set their character in a place familiar to them, encourage them to bring that place to life by sprinkling their writing with words from the associated language. Place names, foods, items of clothing and a variety of other things can all be described in an additional language to transport the reader to this place. Give time for whoever would like to, to read their character description out.

Move on to explore the actual story. Through a quick brainstorm / discussion, ask the group to call out different reasons why people leave one country to move to another. Encourage them to think of every possible reason, whether it is realistic or fantastic.

If they haven't worked it out already, ask group members to choose a reason why their character leaves their homeland for England. As they choose, they must also decide if their character actually wants to leave their home country or not. Ask them to write a short description of the incident that propels the character to leave, try to leave or want to leave. Ask them to paint for their readers a picture of what actually happens and transport us into the world by giving us things to see, hear, touch, taste and smell. The exercise Imagination Stretch in Section One is a good warm up to this kind of instruction.

Give the group ten minutes to write this description and then time for whoever would like to, to read theirs out to the rest of the group.

If the character does want to leave, the writer should think of a series of obstacles their character must overcome in order to get to where they are going. If the character doesn't want to leave, the writer should think of a series of obstacles that prevent the character from staying, meaning that they eventually have to leave. Ask them to brainstorm as many obstacles as possible.

Ask a couple of members of the group to volunteer an example obstacle they have written down. Ask the rest of the group to analyse on a scale of one to ten how dramatic and severe the obstacle might be in a character's

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life. Ask them to brainstorm as many different ways as possible a character might overcome them.

After this group exercise ask each individual to take some time to decide how severe each of the obstacles that they have come up with are by rating them on a scale of one to ten (with one being a minor inconvenience and ten, a crisis of epic proportions). From their original list ask them to select the ones they want to use in their stories. Give them the following two tips:

1. Let them know their story will work best if the obstacles increase in severity as the story goes on, leading towards the ultimate test of character and the dramatic crisis and then resolution.
2. Tell them not to cram too many obstacles into the story. The problem with too many obstacles is that the story could just end up as a list of things that happen, and an unrealistic list at that. Each writer needs to leave space and time for the characters in the story to feel and react, and to locate us in the world of the story.

Although the world of the story is a heightened version of real life, it still has to be believable. Young people often cram several soap opera type storylines into a short sequence. Spend some one-to-one time with members of your group to ensure they are hitting the right pitch in terms of the level of conflict in the story.

Give them further time to work out how their character overcomes the obstacles in their way. Or do they? How will the story build to a dramatic climax? What will the character learn in the process? How will things end? Will it be a sad or happy ending or a bit of both? Remember, the character's name is a word that will eventually become used in the English language. How will this happen? How does the character feel about being absorbed into a new country, culture and language?

Now each person is ready to write their story. If you have led the group through all of the steps above the likelihood is that they are now imagining some quite rich and complex narratives. This means that you will need to give them proper time to write. On an Arvon course, students are given a couple of hours a day each afternoon to do their own writing in preparation for a final performance at the end of the week. You will

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need to judge for yourself how much time is appropriate for your group members. If you are aiming for rich and fully written stories, it might be a good idea to mix writing time with individual tutorials where you can look at each person's work in more detail and help them realise it in the best possible way.

Finally, if the group members have used the country they come from as a starting point for their word-based character, you can spend some time layering their additional language into the text. You may find young people whose English is not yet fluent, write paragraphs and words in one of their additional languages as a means to help them to tell the story. If the young person is writing the bulk of their story in a language other than English, encourage them to find places in the story where they might use moments of English - perhaps when their character arrives but does not understand the local language.

“

For the first time in my life I was actually forced to sit down and to think who am I, why am I here, what is life..I think that week actually just by finding myself I think it didn't just change me but it helped change others around me and gave me a new perspective about life. —*Pupil*

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## STAGE 3 - EXERCISES THAT LOOK AT FORM AND STRUCTURE

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This section covers creative writing exercises that teach young people about structure. We have split this section into two sub-sections, one covering narrative and character-based writing (stories and plays), and the other covering poetry. It might be a good idea to focus on just one of these forms during your creative writing project.

Each form has its own internal rules or structures and during a short project it could be confusing to try and cover all three. Of course each form contains many other sub-forms or genres. It's not within the scope of this booklet to deal with the conventions of a huge range of forms and genres but we have provided a reading list at the end of this pack full of books and web-links where you can find further inspiration. Think of structure as something into which the young people can pour the contents of their lives and imaginations and that they can then decorate with a variety of languages.

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# NARRATIVE EXERCISE 1

## BASIC STORYTELLING CIRCLE

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### Aims

To develop an understanding of the building blocks of stories  
To practice storytelling and structuring in a group

### Materials

You will need to create picture cards depicting each stage of the story

### Method

You can approach story structure at different levels depending on your group. Described below are three different ways of teaching story structure (basic, intermediate and advanced). You can dive in at one particular level or start with the basic one and work your way up over a period of time.

The idea is for the group to work together at each level creating a group story. This gets them familiar with the essential building blocks of story so they can move on to write their own, ensuring it is well told and works for the person reading it.

### Story cards required:

(Group A)

- When (a picture of a clock)
- Where (a picture of a signpost)
- Who (a picture of a person)
- What (a picture of a question mark)
- The end (a picture of a stop sign)



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(Group B)

- Additional 'What' cards
- Additional 'Who' cards
- Speech Bubble cards (pictures of speech bubbles)
- Emotion cards (pictures of hearts)
- Thought cards (pictures of thought bubbles)

Sit the group in a circle. Explain a few people in the group are going to create a collective story. Start with the cards in Group A. The first three cards ('Who', 'Where' and 'When') can be handed out in any order.

Choose a person in the circle to start the story by answering the prompt on one of these cards. Moving clockwise around the circle (but skipping some people if you have a large group) choose a second and third person to respond to the prompts on the next two cards. By the time you have placed all three cards you should end up with a time, place and character. Together these elements build a story.

Ensure each person takes their turn promptly and ask each person to be as specific as possible in their answers to the prompts. Answers to the question 'When?' might be a particular year, a time of year, a month, a day and/or a time of day or night. 'Where' and 'Who' can also be described in detail.

You might want to use two of the 'Who?' cards so there is more than one character in the story. If you decide to do this you might also want to find a moment to explain the concept of 'protagonist' and 'antagonist' (or, in simpler terms 'hero' and 'villain'). The protagonist normally wants something in the story but is stopped by the antagonist. You can draw on famous examples to illustrate your point i.e. Batman and the Joker, Dorothy and the Wicked Witch, Harry Potter and Voldemort.

After you have handed out the 'Who' 'Where' and 'When' cards, move onto 'What'. The 'What' card signifies what happens in the story. As such this card can also be repeated more than once so there is more than one significant event. If your group is getting the hang of this easily, you can use the intermediate level story structure exercise (overleaf) to explain in more detail the build-up of events that lead to a dramatic climax.

Finish with 'The End' card and ask the person who has this card to find a resolution that pulls everything together.

As you go along, keep an eye out for how well the story hangs together. If it hangs together well you can move quickly to start another story. The next time round repeat the Who? and What? cards more than once and also introduce the 'Dialogue' 'Thoughts' and 'Feelings' cards. These last three cards bring to life the characters in the story. You can introduce them whenever you think the action is significant enough to warrant a human response.

Allow the group to practice a few times without being stopped. On the next time around though, if the story doesn't hang together, stop and ask the group for their thoughts on what is and isn't working. Encourage them back in the direction of something that hangs together in a better way.



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## NARRATIVE EXERCISE 2

# INTERMEDIATE STORYTELLING CIRCLE

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### Aims

- To develop an understanding of the building blocks of stories
- To practice storytelling and structuring in a group

### Materials

You will need to create cards which can represent the following:

- Setting the scene (this includes the 'where' and 'when' and all the characters)
- The call to adventure
- Complications
- The major turning point
- The moment of highest tension
- What was learned in the end

### Background information

**Setting the scene** includes the who, when and where of the story. It introduces us to the main character and shows them living their life in their everyday normal way.

In the **call to adventure**, something prompts the character out of their everyday existence and propels them to do something unusual for them. The storyteller of this section should describe what the unusual thing is and what effect it has on the main character.

**Complications** are the challenges facing the main character as they respond to the unusual event now become more complicated. The storyteller should describe is making the character's life more difficult, how they rise to those challenges and how they feel about their new situation.

The **major turning point** is a moment when something happens that changes everything. The main character is also often changed in him / herself. It often involves a moment of danger or trepidation in which the character must make a crucial decision.

The **moment of highest tension** is the moment of catastrophe in the story in which everything may seem lost. The character is beset by the forces of darkness and may need to make a sacrifice in order to return to normal.

**What was learned in the end.** Having resolved the moment of highest tension, the character now returns to their normal existence. But what is it that they have learned? Is there a moral to the story, if so who delivers it?

## Method

You might want to start with an example story and as a group work to break it down into the sections listed above so everyone understands the concepts. Once you have done this, form a group circle as in the basic level exercise and hand out the cards to members of the group in turn. Each person should respond to the card they have been given by telling that section of the story. You can include more people and elaborate on the story by again using the dialogue, emotion and thought bubble cards.

As this level of story structure is more complex it may be less spontaneous and involve more discussion. Consequently another way of running this level is to work in groups of four or five, then asking each of these groups to feed back to the larger group. When feeding back to the large group you as the facilitator can also comment on how well the different sections are working in each of the stories that have been constructed.

“

To be able to celebrate your culture you have to have your language alive. —Teacher

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## NARRATIVE EXERCISE 3

# ADVANCED STORYTELLING

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### Aims

- To develop fully-realised narrative structures

### Method

This level is based on Joseph Campbell's *The Hero's Journey*. You can read more about it in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and in Christopher Vogler's book *The Writer's Journey*.

The Hero's Journey is an archetypal story pattern, common in ancient myths as well as modern day adventures including many action films and popular TV series.

One way to start exploring this story structure would be to watch the 1977 film *Star Wars*, any of the Indiana Jones films, *Shrek*, *The Wizard of Oz* or *The Lion King*. *Harry Potter* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* also use stages of The Hero's Journey and there is a wealth of information on the internet that explores how to work with The Hero's Journey creatively.

What follows is an overview of the model, a brief explanation of its component parts and a list of questions that might help you to work with students who are developing their own stories over a number of sessions. You will not need to ask all of the questions, just choose a selection to flesh out what the writer has already started with.

As we have suggested in the basic and intermediate story structure, you might want to set up a storytelling circle.

Although this model seems complex, most people instinctively understand the components of a good story. The model lends itself particularly well to genre writing i.e. horror, science fiction, fantasy, crime, thrillers, action,

fairy tales etc. However, it is also possible to use to it write character-based drama. In fact external plot is often there to create an emotional inner journey for a character.

The stages laid out below do not all need be present in every story, and in some cases (The Lion King for example) can be told in a different order.

1. The Hero in his / her Natural Environment / Limited Awareness of Problem
2. The Call to Action / Increased Awareness of the Need for Change
3. The Refusal of the Call / Fear / Resistance to Change
4. Meeting of the Mentor / Overcoming Fear
5. Crossing the Threshold / Committing to Change
6. Trial and First Failure / Experimenting with New Conditions
7. Tests, Allies and Enemies, Growth and New Skills and First Success / Preparing for Major Change
8. Grand Trial, Revelation and Insight / Big Change with Feeling of Life and Death
9. Discarding Old Self and Accepting the New Role / Accepting Consequences of New Life
10. The Road Back / New Challenge and Rededication
11. The Final Challenge / Final Attempts and Last Minute Danger
12. Restoring Order and Taking a New Place in the World / Mastery

When you are reading the paragraphs below that seem focused on action and genre writing, take a minute to think how external events might affect the character's inner life. It's entirely possible the external world conflicts are suburban or pedestrian in some other way. On occasion the forces of antagonism might come from within a character's own psyche.

### **The Hero in his / her natural environment**

The ordinary world is often the Hero's hometown. This might be a peaceful place that the hero must save from impending doom, a wasteland that he or she must restore or simply suburbia. The Hero may be dissatisfied with the ordinary and express a desire for adventure but this is not always the case. Sometimes miraculous or unusual circumstances surround the Hero's birth - this might be prophecy or a sense that the child is the chosen one. However, we do not always meet the Hero during their childhood or at the time of their birth.

**Questions**

- *Where does the character live? Describe this place in some detail.*
- *How does the character feel about where they live? What is wrong with this place?*
- *What kind of frustration does the character feel with their home and / or themselves?*
- *What are they looking for / what do they want?*
- *Is there anything special about the character?*
- *Is there any kind of threat to the place where the character lives or to the character themselves?*
- *What is the character's major flaw, failing or inadequacy?*
- *What makes the character incomplete or feel incomplete?*

**The Call to Action**

Pretty soon after the circumstances of the story and the character have been established (see the Setting the Scene stage in the intermediate story structure exercise) the Hero receives a Call to Adventure (see also the Call to Adventure Stage in the intermediate story structure exercise).

This is normally delivered by a Herald of some description who lets the Hero know that s/he must leave the ordinary world and travel into the land of adventure.

**Questions**

- *What kind of thing might happen to the character that is out of the ordinary?*
- *Who might challenge the character to do something different to normal?*
- *What might prompt the character out of their normal routine?*
- *What kind of thing might personally threaten them?*
- *What might excite them into doing something different?*
- *How does the character respond to a threat to their environment?*
- *How might the character respond if they were told that they were 'The Chosen One'?*
- *What kind of incident might unsettle the character and push them out of their comfort zone?*

**Refusal of the Call**

The Hero must then decide how to answer the Call. It might be the Hero refuses the call but whoever or whatever is calling tries again. The Call knows where the Hero lives and won't let him or her go. Alternatively

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it might be that even though the Hero is uncertain or scared about the prospective adventure, he or she realises it is pointless to resist and so goes ahead. In other versions of the mythic structure the Hero realises it is impossible to remain normal even though they would quite like to. Alternatively the Hero might find themselves abducted before they even know what the call is or that they were addressed. In this case the Hero is a Cosmic Plaything and resigns him / herself to fate.

### **Questions**

- *How does the character feel about being propelled out of their comfort zone?*
- *How does the character feel about leaving home?*
- *How does the character feel about being called upon to do something different?*
- *Does the character resist the call to something higher / different? If so how?*
- *How does the character feel about being the chosen one?*
- *Is the character taken somewhere new without their consent?*
- *How do they respond to this?*
- *Does the character find themselves somewhere by accident? How do they feel about this?*
- *How does the character rationalise their fear?*
- *If the character wants to go on the adventure, who might express fear on their behalf?*

### **Meeting the Mentor**

To help the Hero face their adventure there is often a Mentor figure. The Mentor is a wise person who supplies the Hero with the knowledge, resources and confidence they need in order to survive the forthcoming journey. Think about Merlin, Yoda or Q in the Bond movies, Glenda the Good Witch in the Wizard of Oz or even the Fairy Godmother in Cinderella. The mentor does not necessarily need to be a person. It might be a map from a previous adventure or some kind of magical tchotchke or other supernatural aid.

### **Questions**

- *Who might be able to offer the character some advice or guidance to help them on their journey?*
  - *What kind of person might the mentor be?*
  - *What kind of knowledge, wisdom or insight do they possess?*
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- *What kind of advice might they give?*
  - *Is this figure necessarily positive and benevolent or are there other ways in which they might encourage the character along the journey (for example, by taking up a contrary position that results in the character resolving to go ahead anyway)?*
  - *Are there any particular items that could assist the character on their journey?*

### **Crossing the First Threshold**

Armed with supplies from the Mentor, the Hero is now wholeheartedly committed to the adventure ahead and crosses a threshold into a world where the rules and logic are different from the ones they normally abide by. The most obvious example of this is in *The Wizard of Oz* but it is equally apparent when Bond sets out on his adventures after being told his mission by M and receiving his bag of tricks from Q.

In some genres, such as science fiction, fantasy and horror there are physical elements that signify the entrance to the special world such as doors, gates, bridges, rabbit holes and wardrobes whose back walls open up into an endless wintry forest.

Sometimes there is a threshold guardian who either tries to prevent the Hero from entering or who needs to be acknowledged in some way before the hero can fully enter.

Whether the hero has been given the choice or not, this stage represents the hero's commitment to tackling the goal, problem or opportunity with which they have been presented.

### **Questions**

- *What does the hero do at this point in the story to show that they are committed to their journey?*
- *Does the hero pass through a physical portal at this stage of the story into some kind of new realm?*
- *Does the hero need to convince anyone of their resolve?*

### **Tests, Allies and Enemies**

Along with Growth, New Skills and First Success, this phase comprises the meat of the action in any story. This section of the cycle makes up part of what was described as 'Complications' in the intermediate story structure exercise.

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It is during this phase the Hero learns the rules of the Special world/s he has entered, which is often dominated by a villain or shadow who sets rules and traps for the Hero. During this phase in the story the Hero has to work out who s/he can rely on. In coming across a variety of potential allies and enemies, the Hero learns the ropes in the new world. How s/he responds to each one is a test of his / her character.

Often the Hero picks up a sidekick or a group of allies in this phase that will help him / her prepare for the bigger trials that are yet to come. Other enemies and rivals are also often present.

The Hero also often fails the first trial they are subjected to, but this only serves to provide them with learning that will stand them in good stead later down the road or deeper into the cave.

This stage can be difficult for a writer to grapple with but in actual fact it can all be summed up by the word 'disorientation'. To put it simply, it's a bit like going to school for the first time when you are five or six. Remember how scared you were? How you needed to work out who you could and couldn't trust? Just like the hero at this stage of their journey.

### **Questions**

- *What or who is it that now turns the hero's world upside down?*
- *Does the hero go through any change of appearance in this new world?*
- *What are the new rules the character has to deal with?*
- *Does the hero have any new powers at this stage of the story?*
- *How exactly is the character disorientated?*
- *What kind of test now challenges the hero?*
- *Who can the hero trust and who must he / she stay away from?*
- *How does the hero work this out?*
- *Is there someone who is not what they seem (a shapeshifter?)*
- *What does the hero learn as they grapple with the feeling of disorientation?*

### **Growth, New Skills and First Success**

Eventually the Hero learns the rules of this new world and, with his/her allies by their side, experiences a first success based on their learning and new knowledge.

This phase is also often called The Approach as it is the time in the story when the Hero and his / her sidekicks must approach the inmost cave where the object of their quest lies. This might be a villain's lair or a wicked witch's castle. Whatever it is, it is defended fiercely and with new guardians that might include monsters, temptresses, shape-shifters and deadly opposites.

The Hero must use everything they have learned so far to get inside the minds and hearts of these new enemies to break down their defenses and get past them. The urgency of life and death is underscored and new qualities emerge from the Hero as s/he is put under huge amounts of pressure.

In a character-based drama the hero is often revealed at this stage as being flawed - there is a gap between their identity and their essence. In order to truly conquer the challenge they have been set they must overcome this character flaw. As well as approaching an external challenge the hero must also deal with internal barriers and limitations.

### **Questions**

- *What is the Hero's failing?*
- *What new friendships are now forged?*
- *Is there a love interest?*
- *Where does the villain of the story live?*
- *How is the villain's lair defended or protected?*
- *What does the Hero seek to find?*
- *What must the Hero do to dig deep inside him or herself?*
- *How can the pressure on the Hero be raised after the previous section of the story?*

### **The Grand Trial / Ordeal**

We are now at The Major Turning Point as described in the intermediate story structure exercise. As well as being described as The Grand Trial it is also often called The Ordeal.

At this point in the story the Hero confronts their greatest fear and breaks into the inmost cave / villain's lair in order to retrieve something, someone or else some crucial knowledge. The hostile forces in the story are at their strongest opposition and in mythic terms they represent death. The Hero faces death so that s/he can be reborn and transformed.

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The Hero almost dies but they manage to cheat death. This is witnessed by someone who is overjoyed that they are still alive. They articulate what we also feel for the hero. This is the midway point in the story but not the final dramatic climax. Although the Hero has faced the villain and cheated death s/he has not destroyed them. In character-driven drama this represents the point of no return. The hero simply cannot continue towards their goal without addressing their fatal flaw. During the ordeal they are pushed hard enough that their ego is shattered into a million pieces and their shining essence is revealed.

### **Questions**

- *What kind of forces will the antagonist attack with?*
- *How will the Hero be brought close to death (or death of identity)?*
- *How will they manage to survive this death and stand up to / defeat the antagonist?*
- *Who will be by the Hero's side to witness this ordeal?*
- *How will the witness feel when the fight is done?*
- *How will the antagonist confront the Hero's flaw / sense of identity?*
- *What kind of essence will we find buried beneath the Hero's external façade?*

### **Discarding the Old Self and Accepting the New Role**

This stage is also often called The Reward. Having cheated Death, the Hero now recognises his/her new power and strength. The action pauses for a short time to allow the Hero and their gang to celebrate and to confess their feelings. Often the Hero comes to view the world in a new and radically different way at this stage, either because of a critical breakthrough s/he made or some crucial information s/he's uncovered. Others around them also notice a change in the Hero.

### **Questions**

- *How will the Hero and their friends relax once the ordeal is done?*
- *How does the new reborn Hero behave differently to his / her old self?*
- *How do the others around the Hero now see him or her?*
- *How can the writer lighten the mood after the ordeal?*

### **The Road Back**

With the reward received from the inmost cave and major turning point, the Hero has to decide whether s/he is ready to leave the special world and return to the ordinary world or else stay. Staying in the special world

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may involve being offered a new kind of role and identity in this world or it may involve defeating the forces of darkness for once and for all. S/he may even want to stay but there are usually forces that propel the Hero home.

On the road home, the villain or shadow comes after the Hero with a vengeance. The Hero stalls the opposition in every way possible. S/he is often called upon to sacrifice something or someone and at this stage of the story, friends and allies often die in the fight.

In character-based drama, having climbed their personal Everest, the Hero now has to get down. They are presented with a rock and a hard place dilemma - they have to choose between what they want and what they need, often the choice is between a material goal and love. This dilemma is often most dramatically satisfying when the character is taken to a desperate place.

### **Questions**

- *What would be the most difficult decision you can present the character with?*
- *What kind of situation would force the hero to choose between what s/he wants and what s/he needs?*
- *Does the hero want to return home or go back to his or her old ways?*
- *What is calling the hero back to his / her old ways / home?*
- *What is the most extreme thing that the forces of darkness now throw at the hero?*
- *What kind of sacrifice must the hero now make?*
- *What kind of situation would force the hero into the most desperate of places?*

### **The Final Challenge**

This stage of the story is what was described as The Moment of Highest Tension in the intermediate story structure exercise. There is often a final catastrophe at this stage during which it seems that everything is lost. This catastrophe tests the Hero's resolve one last time and challenges him / her to set a final goal.

The last dangerous meeting with death is different to that in The Ordeal / Grand Trial as this time the Hero deals with it in a different way, using all of their learning and demonstrating a resurrection of self has taken place.

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The stakes are even higher this time and the threat can be to the whole world rather than to just the Hero. In this climax the Hero is transformed once more and the final blow is dealt to the shadow.

Alternatively, they may lose the external battle but win the war against their personal demons. In certain cases their flesh may even perish, but their soul soars.

### **Questions**

What is the most catastrophic thing that can now happen to our hero?

What choice would show that the hero has been transformed by their journey and has become a better person?

Will the hero win the battle against the external forces and if not, how can you show that they are still personally transformed?

If the hero dies how can you show that their spirit was not broken even at the point of death?

### **Restoring Order / Taking A New Place in the Old World**

Having been transformed and resurrected over several stages, the Hero returns home with a new treasure and / or new understanding. Whether it is a tangible object or a personal quality or an object that represents a quality, it often signifies wellness and wholeness not just for the Hero but also for the wider community and / or world. Love, Wisdom, Freedom and Knowledge are popular values celebrated at the end of stories.

Perceptions have been changed both within and without and now the Hero is rewarded for his / her sacrifices. Poetic Justice is served to the villain / shadow and the end of a story works particularly well if the just deserves are dished out with an unexpected twist.

### **Questions**

- *How will the hero celebrate their achievements?*
- *Who else will celebrate and acknowledge their achievements?*
- *Now that the hero is out of danger how do we understand what they have learnt and how they have been transformed?*
- *Is the hero rewarded with something external or internal?*
- *What happens in the end to the forces of darkness?*

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## **NARRATIVE EXERCISE 3**

# **ADVANCED STORYTELLING**

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### **AIMS**

To explore characterisation

### **METHOD**

In this activity, the young people can work in small groups or alone. The advantage of working in a group is they can bounce ideas off one another and by working collectively can feel safer. However, by working alone, each young person creates their own protagonist that can be used in an individual story.

Each group or individual draws a stick person on a piece of flip chart paper. Ask them to decide on a few simple facts about this person: name, age, gender and (if they are a young person) where they go to school and a few facts about the school.

Next to the character's left hand they write all the character's positive qualities and next to the right hand, their negative qualities.

Ask them to draw a thought bubble next to the characters head and a heart shape on their chest. In the thought bubble, the young people writes the character's motto (a guiding principle the character lives by). In the heart, they write how the character feels a lot of the time.

On the left foot they write the character's ambition or dream and next to their right foot a secret that no one else but the character knows.

Now the group or individuals have created a character full of inner conflict. This inner conflict can be exploited by other characters, who in turn will drive the narrative itself.

After getting each group or collection of individuals to talk through the characters they have created, choose one character to work with and ask someone to volunteer to play this character.

The person playing this character sits on a chair in the middle of the room. The rest of the group is asked to become other characters that might appear in this person's drama.

One-by-one each member of the group chooses a character and, depending on how close they are to the central character, they choose a place to stand in relation to them. Far away from the central chair signifies they are not close to the central character; close to, or touching, the chair signifies that they are extremely close.

“

Arvon changed the way I feel about writing. It made me feel more confident in myself when I am writing. —*Pupil*

”





Once the other members of the group have chosen their position they assume a stance that portrays their attitude to the central character i.e. turning away might represent some kind of conflict or absence, a threatening stance might signify bullying, a low down stance might mean that the central character has done something to weaken this person.

These stances must then be held as a freeze frame for a short time while you walk around the group and individually tap each person on the shoulder.

When they are tapped on the shoulder, each young person says the name of their character and a short sentence that sums up their attitude and relationship to the main character on the central chair i.e. 'why don't you care about me', 'I gave you everything you have', 'I miss you, when are you coming home', or whatever comes into their heads and is informed by their choice of stance.

Encourage your group throughout the exercise to throw away any conception of right or wrong. They should just say the first thing that comes into their heads. Encourage everyone to take their turn promptly. If they really can't think of anything ask them for a single word or tell them that you will come back to them a bit later.

If you can, record the characters and sentences that are generated. The tableau and character sketches can be used as the first steps towards creating a group play. If each member of the group has developed a stick person for themselves, you can repeat the exercise many times and use it as the basis for individual stories based on each person's central character. The authors can decide for themselves how many of the subsidiary characters they want to keep in their story and which ones are not useful to them. They do not have to accommodate them all.

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## NARRATIVE EXERCISE 5

### SIMPLE CHARACTER & PLOT EXERCISE

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#### Aims

- To develop both characters and plots

#### Method

Everyone starts by introducing themselves and one fact about themselves.

In groups of four, the young people come up with four characters and think of an interesting fact for each of them. Each group feeds one character back to the larger group. The rest of the group add in additional facts and call them out in a brainstorm fashion. The facilitator keeps an eye on coherence.

Now the whole group has four characters. Back in the smaller groups of four, the young people come up with a situation in which all four of these characters might meet. They feed back the bones of this situation to the larger group and the larger group (steered by the facilitator) asks questions about the situation in order to help it expand and become coherent. It can't be emphasised enough how much the facilitator needs to keep an eye on the logic – some young people will endlessly add until it becomes completely fantastical. The smaller group can pick and choose what they like from this large group discussion and add it into their situation / story.

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The project makes you think how your culture and speaking your language is important, and it might be important for your future. —*Pupil*

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# **NARRATIVE EXERCISE 6**

## **CHARACTER, ACTION & LOCATION**

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### **Aims**

- To provide stimulus for the creation of culturally relevant stories
- To use a random combination of stimulus material to generate surprise creative outcomes
- To promote divergent and creative thinking
- To model storytelling as a group process

### **Materials**

- Three small bags or other containers
- A selection of characters, locations and situations that you have pre-prepared on cards.
- Flip chart paper and marker pens

### **Method**

When you are preparing the various elements try to think of locations, characters and situations culturally relevant to your group i.e. a church in Pakistan, a market place in the Gambia, a young Romani girl, a Somali musician and poet or the night before an arranged marriage. Remember also things like the local chicken shop, an argument on the bus, the school playground and hiding under the stairs and anything else that might happen in the UK are also as culturally relevant to the group.

It's important the situation cards are as full of dramatic potential as possible. They should raise a question in the reader's mind as to what might have happened prior to the situation occurring, and what might happen next. The best situations will impart a sense of trepidation and conflict. For example you might make up cards that describe hiding under the stairs, a bus crash, running away in the middle of the night or the theft of a diamond ring.

Organise the group into groups of three or four. Hand round the bags or pots of words and get each group to choose one from each category. Provide each group with flip chart paper and marker pens.

Depending where you are in the creative writing project and the energy and needs of your group, there are several ways of running this exercise. You might want to follow the stages described in the exercise 'The Sweet Shop' in order to break the creative process down and ensure it is not intimidating or you might want to take a more organic and conversational route.

In the case of the latter, encourage each group to spend some time at first generating as many possibilities as they can. It might be helpful to set a time limit of five minutes for this stage and to keep calling out from the front of the group that everyone needs to get as many ideas down on paper as possible.

Once the group has freely generated lots of material, the next stage would be for them to hone in on the combination of elements they think would make the best potential story.

Follow this with a whole group discussion. Ask each group to read out their idea and work with them to tease out a proper story structure. The Heroes Journey (which you can read about in the 'Advanced Storytelling' exercise above) will help you with this. Young people often have a tendency to squeeze too much into a story and you will probably find yourself asking them to consider things like cause and effect and realism. Another tendency is for young people to copy things they have seen on TV such as storylines from Coronation Street. Although throwing together random components in this exercise should counteract that tendency somewhat, it is still worth keeping an eye out for this and trying to interrogate it where you can. Spending some time at the front of the class teasing out group members' ideas will act as a masterclass for everyone involved.

Choose one group's idea as a premise and write up on a board the main elements that make up this premise i.e. characters, location, situation, beginning, suspense, surprise, moment of highest tension, end so everyone is clear what the structure is.

Ask your group members to raise their hands to begin telling the story. One student at a time. One sentence at a time. Encourage everyone to contribute and equally take their turn. If only a few young people are contributing, try not to let any single person add two sentences in a row. Keep encouraging more voices into the room.

As the story unfolds, point to any element on the board that has been left out and needs to be added. For example, if the solution is not surprising, point to the word “surprise.” Or, if the solution arrives too quickly, with no suspense, point to the word “suspense”.

The last part of this group exercise will provide a model for how a story can be created. It’s a safe way to experience creating a story, which won’t produce “writer’s block” because there isn’t much pressure on any one student to carry the entire load.

However, once they’ve had the fun of contributing ideas to the group, your students should find it easier to write a complete story by themselves.

“

There is one pupil who never speaks out in class, would never read out in class, but I have definitely seen that change in him. He is much more likely to speak out in class, I’ve seen him carry that confidence back into the classroom.

—Teaching Assistant

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# POETRY ACTIVITY 1

## COMPRESS AND MAKE VISUAL

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### Aims

- To learn how to compress language
- To make language visual
- To experiment with techniques such as cut and paste

### Method

The idea of this activity is to take a song, rap or poem the young people know well and write an extra passage to it or an extra verse, keeping the rhythm, tone, beat, style and subject the same.

The group comes up with a series of normal sentences based on the theme of the poem or song. Either collectively or individually they cut these sentences up in order to investigate how line breaks help to add rhythm and inform poetic structure. It could be an emotion, something the writer feels strongly about or a description of an action i.e. this happened and then this happened etc.

To structure this, as a group, write four sentences, each linking to the previous, and in small groups, break them down into seven lines or in an alternative version nine lines. Model with one or two sentences how the rhythm might change if the paragraph was broken up into smaller lines. The young people are then asked to read out the new shorter sentences and the rest of the group listen to the new rhythm. Ask the group to tap out the rhythm without the words (some of the groups we worked with found this difficult and so you might want to refer readers to **Exercises for Reading Aloud** here and they precede this part of this exercise with some performance activities).

As part of this exercise, you might want to discuss as a group how rhythm can inform emotion, for example, viewing each line as a movie shot, meaning it must pack a strong visual image.

After the group has worked on this collectively ask them to come up with their own sentences and work by themselves to transform them rhythmically and poetically.

This activity could be followed by practicing for a group performance of the piece (see **Exercises for Reading Aloud** for more information on developing the performance aspect).



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## POETRY ACTIVITY 2

# WRITING A CINQUAINE

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### Aims

- To experiment with and develop structured poetry

### Method

A cinquaine is a simple poetic structure that teaches us about writing in general. Here is an example:

*Caterpillar*  
*Relentless, Ravenous*  
*Constructing, Evolving, Emerging*  
*Wondrous gift of nature*  
*Butterfly*

You could have this and the following explanation on flip chart paper to show your group)

The 1st line has one word: Noun

The 2nd line has two words: Adjectives

The 3rd line has three words: action words i.e. We see the original noun in action doing something, these words are called verbs or participles

The 4th line has four words: this is the person writing describing their feelings towards the object

The 5th line is one word that sums up the whole of your impression of what you have been writing about

The exercise is to help the group write a cinquaine collectively. It can also be adapted so the group write the first three lines collectively and the last two lines on their own.



For the subject or noun of the first line choose something that moves i.e a creature, or something else external.

Ask the group to list all the adjectives they can think of to describe the noun. The main lesson to be learnt from this process is that before a poet chooses their words, there are many possibilities that need to be thought through before anything is chosen.

The words that are chosen in the first and second lines will lead us towards the next lines.

Guide the group through choosing the best words for the second line. As there are only 11 words altogether in the cinquaine it is important to keep things unified and give a rounded impression.

Ask the following questions to ask the group:

- *Do two words listed mean the same thing?*
- *Are there words that contradict one another? There's not enough room in this form to have too many contradictions.*
- *How much significance value does one word add to another?*

If the group doesn't have enough words you can ask them to use a dictionary or thesaurus. Advise the group that sometimes when writing you might not totally get there in one sitting, sometimes the brain is tired and you need to leave it alone for a couple of days!

The 'Mind Mapping' exercise in the **Exercises to Generate Material** stage can be used to feed into this exercise and remember a cinquaine could also be written using words from more than one language. You might run this activity with the group first and then ask individuals to write their own using more than one language.

“

Poetry isn't about who's smart and who's not, it's just about..it's about inside of yourself, it's about putting pen to paper and then just letting it write.

”

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## POETRY ACTIVITY 3

# PRAISE SONG WORKSHOP

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### Materials

- Copies of the poem *Praise Song for My Mother* by Grace Nichols (from *The Fat Black Woman's Poems*)
- Copies of other praise songs (for example Elmi Ali's *Praise Song to Jazz*)

### Method

The sessions opens with a discussion on things the participants value. This acts as a set up for what is to come i.e. the idea of praising something important to you. These are noted down on the board to use later.

This is followed by a quick five minute free write to free up the mind for writing. (This can be shared in the group)

Introduce the poem *Praise Song for My Mother* by Grace Nichols (from *The Fat Black Woman's Poems*) as a template for praising something important to you. The poem is read out hopefully by one of the participants. This is followed by a discussion of the poem, concentrating on the structure and highlighting the things the poem does well, i.e. the use of the refrain 'You were' that introduces each stanza. It is also important to look at the descriptions of nature in the poem and how they are used to put across character, i.e.

you were  
water to me  
deep and bold and fathoming

This is followed by an attempt at replicating the poem substituting 'the mother' for whatever was important to the participants.

Follow this by sharing and exchanging notes and thoughts.

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## POETRY ACTIVITY 4

### EDITING DOWN A POEM

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#### Aims

- To refine and refine, while maintaining meaning

#### Method

Edit a long poem down to get to the essence – what you really want to say.

Start with 13 lines then go to 11, 9,7,5 until finally you are at 3 lines.

Then you will know what you really want to say.

You can do this as a practice exercise but then use the principle in a poem you want to be a proper piece of work and just get as far as you can.

“

It made me more able to speak up when I've got something to say because I used to not say anything, but now I put my hand up so now I can speak up for myself. —*Pupil*

”



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## **STAGE 4 - EXERCISES TO HELP WITH READING ALOUD**

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At every Arvon residential, we work towards a session of reading aloud on the Friday at the end of the week. During this session, all the writers involved choose a piece of their work to read to the rest of the group, and the others in the group listen with respect to each other's work.

Encouraging young people to read their work aloud has many benefits. It is about celebrating their cultural identity in public and is a celebration of the work they have put into their texts.

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However, many young people (and adults!) feel nervous at the prospect of reading their work aloud and it is important to consider how to create an environment which encourages for all involved the confidence to read their work aloud.

To share and celebrate the writing that has been created, it is important for members of any group to feel part of a supportive community of writers. As you run a series of writing workshops, it is helpful to establish ground rules for reading aloud as early as possible in the process. During workshops, give opportunities to read early drafts aloud. Reading in a circle can often help create an informal environment for those students who are nervous about reading. As the group get to know each other, each will begin to develop the confidence needed to read aloud their final work.

During writing workshops, allow time for members of the group to give positive and constructive feedback on each other's work. It takes time to develop trust, and this tends to build during a residential week where young people spend a number of days in writing workshops together. For the final reading, find a performance space that is a focal point, enabling students the space to move freely as they read aloud.

Young people can be very body conscious and many will find these kinds of exercises difficult, but some of the exercises below aim to help them to overcome the initial nervousness the majority of us feel. In addition, they can be used at any point during the project, as we know moving the body can assist with the creative flow and there is value in mixing physical work in with written work as many young people will not benefit from sitting still for hours on end.

“

The thing I am going to take away is how important it is to know your language, and to remember when you move to another country, because you're focused to learn the language you start to forget, but if you forget your language you forget who you are. —*Pupil*

”

## VOCAL WARM-UP EXERCISES

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### **Role call warm up exercise**

The group shouts together: Shabooyah Sha sha Shabooyah - Role Call!

Individual pupils say: My name is ..... - Yeah! (everyone)

I like to dance - Yeah! (everyone)

and when I do it - Yeah! (everyone)

I jump and prance - ROLE CALL! (everyone)

### **The minister's cat is...**

Everyone claps together and says "1,2,3,4 the Ministers cat is a / an".

Then one person fills in "awesome cat" or "angry cat" and it goes around the circle so each person has to think of a word beginning with a particular letter.. a, b, c (angry, bedeviled, carousing etc).

Everyone keeps the eight clap rhythm as each person takes their turn.

### **Body percussion workshop**

The following exercise is complicated to explain, but simple to deliver. It uses body percussion to teach the musicality of language and is useful in creating coordination among participants when working on group pieces. It relies on the ability to watch and listen to a whole group of participants in order to move in tandem with the beat. It's a fantastic ice-breaker and creates confidence and teamwork within the group.

It uses chanting, stomping and clapping - both the hands and the body to create music. Each word in the chant is a single syllable word and there for in different combinations the words have the potential to create music. The chant below uses a hip hop beat.

Hip hop/ drop/ the beat the beat/ beat drop/ hip hip/ drop the beat/ beat drop  
 Hip (right leg stomp) hop (left leg stomp)  
 drop (hand clap)  
 the (right hand clap on lap) beat (left hand clap on lap) the (right hand clap on lap) beat (Left hand clap on lap)  
 beat drop (two hand claps)  
 hip hip (two right hand claps on chest)  
 drop (back of right hand clapped on palm)  
 the (right hand clapped on palm)  
 beat (right hand slides down to clap right hip)  
 beat (right hand slides back up to clap right hip again)  
 drop (hand clap)

### **Voice exercises**

Ask the students to walk around the room but not bump into one another, filling the empty spaces as they go.

Students are asked for a simple sentence to say aloud. As they walk around the facilitator instructs them to say it to the roof, then to the floor, to a particular area of the room, to their chests, toes, tummy etc.

The group then comes up with a simple sentence such as 'My house in Heaven is Beautiful'. People are then asked to say this sentence in other languages that they know. In our case these languages were Creole, French, Yoruba and Lingala. Everyone in the room is invited to say the sentence in these languages.

They repeat the exercise speaking in different languages to the roof, the floor, the walls, their chests etc.

This exercise links back to earlier stages and the principle of continually inviting the different languages and cultural heritages into the room.

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# FURTHER RESOURCES



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## Writer Database

You can view a list of writers involved in the (M)Other Tongues project online at [www.arvon.org/mothertonguesresource](http://www.arvon.org/mothertonguesresource)

The writer database gives information about experienced bilingual and multi-lingual writers who lead effective creative writing projects with young people and included contact details if you want to get in touch to explore a project idea or workshop.

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## Selected creative writing exercises and resources:

### Books

*Biblio/Poetry Therapy: The Interactive Process: A Handbook* -  
McCarty Hynes, Arleen and Hynes Berry, Mary (North Star Press 1994)

*Can You Read Me? Creative Writing with Child and Adult Victims of Abuse* -  
Jacki Pritchard and Eric Sainsbury (Jessica Kingsley)

*Creative Writing Coursebook* - Graeme Harper (Continuum 2009)

*Creating Writers: Developing Literacy through Creative Writing* -  
James Carter (RoutledgeFalmer)

*Creative Writing Handbook: Developing Dramatic Technique, Individual Style and Voice* - Ed Derek Neale (A&C Black Publishers LTD in association with the Open University 2009)

*Creating Writers in the Primary Classroom* -  
Miles Tandy and Jo Howell (David Fulton. 2008)

*Our Thoughts are Bees: Working with Writers and Schools* -  
Mandy Coe and Jean Sprackland (Published April 2005)

“

It made me proud to be Roma, to use my language. —Pupil

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*The Gamesters Handbook: 140 Games for Teachers and Leaders* -  
Donna Brandes and Howard Phillips (Stanley Thomas)

*The Works: Every Kind of Poem you'll ever need for Literacy Hour* -  
Ed. Paul Cookson (Macmillan Children's Books 2000, reprinted 2010)  
*The Works* is a series of six books that are a great source of poems,  
many on specific themes.

*The Writer's Journey* - Christopher Vogler (Pan Books 1999)

*Wild Mind* - Natalie Goldberg (Random House 1991)

*Writing Down the Bones* - Natalie Goldberg (Shambala 1986)

*1001 Brilliant Writing Ideas* - Ron Snow (Published Routledge 2008)

*45 Master Characters* - Victoria Lynn Schmidt (Writers Digest Books)

### Web Resources

**Translators in Schools** is a professional development programme that aims to widen the pool of translators with the skills to work in schools. The site also holds a bank of model workshops that can be used by translators and teachers.

[www.translatorsinschools.org](http://www.translatorsinschools.org)

**Multilingualism and Literature in the Classroom** is a research project that includes workshop plans online from a series of workshops for students led by Queen Mary English Department, University of London.  
[www.sed.qmul.ac.uk/english/about/multilingualism/resources](http://www.sed.qmul.ac.uk/english/about/multilingualism/resources)

**Critical Connections: Multilingual Digital Storytelling Project** includes an online handbook for teachers.  
[www.goldsmithsmdst.wordpress.com/handbook](http://www.goldsmithsmdst.wordpress.com/handbook)

**A Place for Words** is intended as a starting point, the beginning of a conversation about the role creative writers can play in the regeneration of our towns and cities.  
[www.urbanwords.org.uk/aplaceforwords](http://www.urbanwords.org.uk/aplaceforwords)

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**English and Media Centre** provide publications and professional development on all aspects of English teaching for teachers and students of literature, language and media in the UK and abroad.  
[www.englishandmedia.co.uk](http://www.englishandmedia.co.uk)

**Poetry Class** Fresh ideas for poetry learning from The Poetry Society  
[www.poetryclass.net](http://www.poetryclass.net)

**Writers Centre Norwich** run schools workshops based in the creative arts on the themes of Europe, home, identity and looking at Refugee and asylum seeker issues. See information and resources for teachers.  
[www.writerscentrenorwich.org.uk/schoolcollege](http://www.writerscentrenorwich.org.uk/schoolcollege)

**Young Poets Network** is an online resource from the Poetry Society for young poets up to 25. Here you'll find features about poets and poetry, writing challenges, new writing from young poets and a list of competitions, magazines and writing groups which particularly welcome young poets.  
[www.youngpoetsnetwork.org.uk](http://www.youngpoetsnetwork.org.uk)

### Research and Evaluation

The following reports can also be found online at  
[www.arvon.org/mothertonguesresource](http://www.arvon.org/mothertonguesresource)

*Language Diversity and Attainment in English Secondary Schools: Report commissioned by Arvon's (M)Other Tongues programme* - S. Hollingworth and A. Mansaray (The Institute for Policy Studies in Education IPSE, London 2012) This Report, commissioned by Arvon, identifies which linguistic minorities are at a 'disadvantage' in secondary education in England.

*(M)Other Tongues 2012-2013 Final Evaluation Report* by Dr Caroline Murphy.

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“

This has been a ground-breaking project in terms of recognition of Yoruba culture and language and has benefited everyone concerned.

—*Lambeth LEA*

It has helped me be more confident of being dual heritage.

—*Pupil*

For the first time in my life I was actually forced to sit down and think about who am I, why am I here, what is life... —*Pupil*

”



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**“In this resource, based on Arvon’s (M)Other Tongues programme, you will find a wealth of ideas and exercises to help you inspire and develop creative writing with young people, enabling them to make the most of their linguistic and cultural heritages as a powerful tool for taking control of their learning.” —Ruth Borthwick, Chief Executive, Arvon**

Since 2009, Arvon’s (M)Other Tongues programme has worked with bilingual and multilingual young people from across England including speakers of Portuguese, Yoruba, Somali, Urdu, Mirpuri, Romani and of French-speaking African and Caribbean heritage.

This resource is for teachers, school staff, writers and anyone working with bilingual and multilingual young people. Whilst our programme focused on pupils aged 11 to 16, ideas and exercises could be adapted for higher Key Stage 2 and could equally be used with adult groups.



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