



WRITERS'
CENTRE
NORWICH

Creative Writing Activities for Secondary Schools





Creative Writing Activities

A selection of creative writing activities for use in the classroom or as activities for an extra-curricular creative writing club.

Designed and produced by Mark Grist as part of the Well Versed Poetry in School project.

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The Scarlet Letter

Instruction

Think about the colour red. How does it make you feel? What do you associate it with? Write a six-line poem about the things you connect with the colour red.

For example, this is an extract from a poem by Nicki Heinen entitled '14 ways of looking at the colour white'

Around you a necklace of teeth
To put it in, a thin plastic bag, just emptied
Ripped feather, light wind
At the edge of the road, December
Street lamp blinking, 5am
Fog that gets in your nostrils

Top tip

Try to think of less obvious images people associate with the colour red.



More Than Meets The Eye?

Instruction

Look at this image of a man. What do you think his story is? Do you think he is happy?



Write a paragraph from the perspective of the man about his life so far.

Top Tip

Is the man everything he seems? Does he have any secrets that may not be what you expect?



Catnip Haiku

Instruction

Look at this image- this cat looks pretty pleased with itself.



What do you think it has been up too? Do you think it gets on with its owner? Write a haiku, a three line poem with five syllables on the first line, seven on the second and five again on the third about its adventures.

Top tip

Remember to count your syllables!



Shipwrecked

Instruction

You've been shipwrecked on a desert island with your worst enemy and you're very, very hungry. What are your thoughts towards them? What are you planning to do?

Write an acrostic poem where each line begins with the letters C-A-N-N-I-B-A-L.

Top Tip

Just because it's a poem doesn't mean it has to rhyme!



Lover's Leap

Instruction

Read this sonnet (130) by Shakespeare.

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

You have fallen in love with someone unexpected! Write a sonnet about how you feel about them. Remember, a sonnet is a fourteen-line poem with the rhyme scheme a-b-a-b, c-d-c-d, e-f-e-f, g-g.

Top Tip

It doesn't necessarily have to be a person! It could be a games console or a pet!



Onion Love

Instruction

Read 'Valentine' by Carol Ann Duffy

Not a red rose or a satin heart.

I give you an onion.
It is a moon wrapped in brown paper.
It promises light
like the careful undressing of love.

Here.
It will blind you with tears
like a lover.
It will make your reflection
a wobbling photo of grief.

I am trying to be truthful.

Not a cute card or a kissogram.

I give you an onion.
Its fierce kiss will stay on your lips,
possessive and faithful
as we are,
for as long as we are.

Take it.
Its platinum loops shrink to a wedding-ring,
if you like.

Lethal.
Its scent will cling to your fingers,
cling to your knife.

Carol Ann Duffy has an unexpected take on what love means to her. Write a poem about love, but compare it to an object that some people might find unexpected!

Top Tip

Be daring! Every poet takes risks; you never know you might strike gold.



It's All Just Nonsense

Instruction

Read 'Jabberwocky' by Lewis Carroll.

`Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!"
He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought --
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.
And, as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffing through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!
One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.
"And, has thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!"
He chortled in his joy.

`Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

Write your own nonsense poem about a mysterious creature! Remember it doesn't have to make sense, the more confused you can get the reader the better.

Top Tip

Don't be afraid to make up words. If Shakespeare did it you can do it too!



The Devil's Dictionary

Instruction

Read the definition of these two words from The Devil's Dictionary.

SATIRE, n. An obsolete kind of literary composition in which the vices and follies of the author's enemies were expounded with imperfect tenderness. In this country satire never had more than a sickly and uncertain existence, for the soul of it is wit, wherein we are dolefully deficient, the humour that we mistake for it, like all humour, being tolerant and sympathetic. Moreover, although Americans are "endowed by their Creator" with abundant vice and folly, it is not generally known that these are reprehensible qualities; wherefore the satirist is popularly regarded as a soul-spirited knave, and his ever victim's outcry for co-defendants evokes a national assent.

Hail Satire! be thy praises ever sung
In the dead language of a mummy's tongue,
For thou thyself art dead, and damned as well —
Thy spirit (usefully employed) in Hell.
Had it been such as consecrates the Bible
Thou hadst not perished by the law of libel.
—Barney Stims

CHILDHOOD, n. The period of human life intermediate between the idiocy of infancy and the folly of youth — two removes from the sin of manhood and three from the remorse of age.

Choose two words of your own and rewrite the definitions, don't forget to use a heavy dose of sarcasm.

Top Tip

The more familiar a word the more fun it is to redefine! If you are stuck why not choose school or the NHS?



Playing at War

Instruction

Read '1942' by Katherine Gallagher. It is about the Second World War.

They'd hoped he'd be back for Christmas -
the lights shining down on him, the tree
somehow shielding off the horror. A break.
The family hadn't seen him as a soldier,
in his uniform, among harvested paddocks,
the dried stubble that pricked your legs.

Arriving home, he said Merry Christmas,
hugged people and slapped them on the back.
Wandered about the place, eyes crinkled
with strain, lines dug
into his forehead. So young, he seemed
to be either laughing or very sad
as though, in between,
there was nothing.

Write your own poem about a soldier returning home from war today, how has it affected them?

Top Tip

How are they adjusting to everyday life? Are they happy to be home, or do they want to go back?



Happily Ever After

Instruction

Read 'Peter Pan Versus Captain Hook' by Tamsin Kendrick.

My friend vouched this theory that all men were either
Peter Pans or Captain Hooks. I don't know about you but

I know where I stand. Look what that bastard did to poor Wendy;
Tinkerbell too. I'll have no truck with flighty boys.

Give me instead the feel of steel on my thigh,
the screams of pirates trapped in the boo-boo box.

But most of all give me the whispery hair under the wig,
the gnarled hand, the hook trailing red lines down my abdomen.

He pulls my hair, holds his hook to my mouth, then, suddenly shy,
his mouth. No thimbles in sight. Finally, a real kiss

Write your own poem about falling in love with a character from a fairytale.

Top Tip

Do they have strange personality quirks? Are they even human?



Cabinet of Curiosities

Instruction

The 'Cabinet of Curiosities' was a personal collection of things of wonder that reached the peak of their popularity in the 17th Century. They were the personal and often idiosyncratic collections of wealthy owners and contained both natural and man-made objects, as demonstrated in the following list of some of the items displayed at the Kensington castle of Sir Walter Cope:

"... holy relics from a Spanish ship; earthen pitchers and porcelain from China; a Madonna made of feathers, a chain made of monkey teeth, stone shears, a back-scratcher, and a canoe with paddles, all from "India"; a Javanese costume, Arabian coats; the horn and tail of a rhinoceros, the horn of a bull seal, a round horn that had grown on an Englishwoman's forehead, a unicorn's tail; the baubles and bells of Henry VIII's fool, the Turkish emperor's golden seal ..."

Write a list of things of wonder in an imaginary cabinet of curiosity.

Top Tip

They don't necessarily have to be real!



What a Character!

Instruction

Read the extract below from *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* by Haruki Murakami.

"I turned to see a girl standing in the garden on the other side of the alley. She was small and has her hair in a ponytail. She wore dark sunglasses with amber frames and a light-blue sleeveless T-shirt. The rainy season had barely ended, and yet she had already managed to give her slender arms a nice, smooth tan. She had one hand jammed into the pocket of her shorts. The other rested on a waist-high bamboo gate, which could not have been providing much support... Then she took a box of Hope regulars from her pocket, drew out a cigarette, and put it between her lips. She had a small mouth, the upper lip turned slightly upward. She struck a match and lit her cigarette. When she inclined her head to one side, her hair swung away to reveal a beautifully shaped ear, smooth as if just made, its edge aglow with a downy fringe."

Write a couple of paragraphs introducing a character of your own. What do they look like, what are they wearing? Do you want the reader to like or dislike them?

Top Tip

If you're stuck for ideas, why not try describing a friend? Many writers use their own experience as inspiration for their work.



Chatterbox

Instruction

Read this classic example from Ernest Hemingway's story 'Hills Like White Elephants.' In the story, a man and a woman sit in a train station bar talking. As the scene progresses, it becomes clear that she's pregnant and the man wants her to have an abortion:

"The beer's nice and cool," the man said.

"It's lovely," the girl said.

"It's really an awfully simple operation, jig," the man said. "It's not really an operation at all."

The girl looked at the ground the table legs rested on.

"I know you wouldn't mind it, jig. It's really not anything. It's just to let the air in."

The girl did not say anything.

"I'll go with you and I'll stay with you all the time. They just let the air in and then it's all perfectly natural."

"Then what will we do afterward?"

"We'll be fine afterward. Just like we were before."

"What makes you think so?"

"That's the only thing that bothers us. It's the only thing that's made us unhappy."

Note how the abortion is only alluded to- since it's the main subject of their conversation why would they mention it directly? See how by refraining from spelling it out Hemingway keeps the conversation realistic. Write your own conversation about a sensitive subject trying to do the same.

Top Tip

Remember you don't want to spell it out too explicitly but the reader still has to understand what they are talking about!



Chaos on the Page

Instruction

Read the following poem, 'The Head of Progress' by Mark Grist. How effective is he in creating a chaotic scene?

There's a fight, Sir
By the lockers, Sir
And Aidan's battered Paul
Daniel's strangled Jordan
Cos Jordan took his ball
Isaac's ripped his shirt sir
And Michael spat on Sue
She was only trying to stop them
And she's got it on her shoe!
The lunchtime supervisor left sir
She said she couldn't stay
Jane's crying in the toilets
And the Gerbil got away
Saqib knocked the cage Sir
The door, it just flipped back
And it ran behind the cupboard
And it's stuck inside a crack.
We poked it with a stick, sir
But the powder paint got spilt
It's all over the carpet
And that castle Connor built
I think you ought to come sir
Mildred Miles was sick
And all the boys were yelling
And Martin threw a brick
It nearly hit John Bailey
and he stepped on Sama's thumb
So shall I say you're coming?
She's wants to call her mum
Shall we get the cleaners?
And can I mop the paint?
The new boy's torn his jacket
And he thinks he's going to faint.
The other teachers said Sir
That I should come to you
Cos you're the head of Progress
So you'd know what to do.
Sir.

Try to create your own scene of chaos – make notes first of all on the situation.

Top Tip

Try thinking of an unusual setting. You could chose a football game, birthday party, or trip to the supermarket



A Palace for the Soul

Instruction

Read 'The Palace of Art' by Alfred Lord Tennyson

I built my soul a lordly pleasure-house,
Wherein at ease for aye to dwell.
I said, "O Soul, make merry and carouse,
Dear soul, for all is well!"

A huge crag-platform, smooth as burnish'd brass
I chose. The ranged ramparts bright
From level meadow-bases of deep grass
Suddenly scaled the light.

Thereon I built it firm. Of ledge or shelf
The rock rose clear, or winding stair:
My soul would live alone unto herself
In her high palace there.

And "while the world runs round and round," I said,
"Reign thou apart, a quiet king,
Still as, while Saturn whirls, his steadfast shade
Sleeps on his luminous ring."

To which my soul made answer readily:
"Trust me, in bliss I shall abide
In this great mansion, that is built for me,
So royal-rich and wide."

Imagine you were going to make a palace for your soul. What would your soul want to keep it happy?

Top Tip

Let your imagination run wild. What are the things that make you feel content? You don't need to make your palace out of the usual building materials.



Portrait of a Hero

Instruction

Read the following extract from 'The Gladiator' by Lord Byron.

I see before me the gladiator lie:
He leans upon his hand; --- his manly brow
Consents to death, but conquers agony,
And his drooped head sinks gradually low ---
And through his side the last drops, ebbing slow
From the red gash, fall heavy, one by one,
Like the first of a thunder-shower; and now
The arena swims around him --- he is gone,
Ere ceased the inhuman shout which hailed the wretch who won.

Try writing your own 9 line poem about someone famous. It could be a
Footballer
Singer
Celebrity
Or anyone else you can think of

Top Tip

You could write about them falling from grace, if you like. A tragic end to the poem would be a really interesting direction to take it in.



Not Going Down Without a Fight

Instruction

Read the poem 'Address to The Toothache' by Robert Burns.

My curse upon your venom'd stang,
That shoots my tortur'd gums along;
And thro' my lugs gies mony a twang,
Wi' gnawing vengeance;
Tearing my nerves wi' bitter pang,
Like racking engines!

When fevers burn, or ague freezes,
Rheumatics gnaw, or cholick squeezes;
Our neighbors' sympathy may ease us,
Wi' pitying moan;
But thee -- thou hell o' a' diseases --
They mock our groan!

Try writing your own curse on one of the following ailments

Address to bad breathe

Address to a stubbed toe

Address to an itch

Or any other ailment you can think up

Top Tip

Try putting in slang and some interesting insults to add some spice to the piece.



6 Word Stories

Instruction

Read the following stories. Each is only 6 words long.

Failed SAT. Lost scholarship. Invented rocket.

- William Shatner

Computer, did we bring batteries? Computer?

- Eileen Gunn

Gown removed carelessly. Head, less so.

- Joss Whedon

From torched skyscrapers, men grew wings.

- Gregory Maguire

See that shadow? (It's not yours.)

- Jim Crace

Dad called: DNA back: he isn't.

- Helen Fielding

For Sale. Child's shoes. Never worn

- Ernest Hemingway

Now try writing three of your own 6 word stories. What did you come out with? Could any of these be expanded into a longer one?

Top Tip

Don't forget that you can use as much (or as little) punctuation as you like!