



ALEXANDRA CAMERON, 10G

MIA HOUGHTON, 10E

JENNY GROUNDS, 10A

ANDREW SCHWALLER, 10F

CHRISTINE SOWDEN, YEAR 12

LILY RACHEL, 7A

BEN XAIOLONG TIVEY, 7C

TRUDY NEWMAN-HART, STAFF

ROWAN GIBBONS, 10C

MICHAEL SEAGER, 9F

LESLEY SEAGER, STAFF

LUKE STEWART, 10E

EBS WRITING GROUP

INTRODUCTION

I WAS HONOURED TO TAKE ON THE ROLE OF WRITER IN RESIDENCE AT EAST BARNET SCHOOL IN SEPTEMBER 2012. MY BRIEF, AS A PUBLISHED AUTHOR OF FICTION FOR YOUNG ADULTS AND JOURNALIST WITH TWENTY YEARS' EXPERIENCE, WAS TO GET THE STUDENTS ENGAGED IN WRITING, TO INSPIRE THEM AND TO HELP DEVELOP THEIR SKILLS.

I TURNED UP FOR THE FIRST CREATIVE WRITING CLUB FEELING EXCITED BUT WITH A TOUCH OF TREPIDATION TOO. WOULD ANYONE COME? WOULD I BE SITTING ALONE IN A CLASSROOM FOR AN HOUR? AND IF ANYONE DID TURN UP, WOULD THEY RETURN THE FOLLOWING WEEK? AND THE NEXT? AFTER ALL, THERE HAVE NEVER BEEN MORE DEMANDS ON STUDENTS' TIME...

I'M HAPPY TO SAY THAT I NEEDN'T HAVE WORRIED. A CORE GROUP OF STUDENTS CAME TO THE VERY FIRST SESSION AND HAVE BEEN PART OF THE CLUB EVER SINCE. WE'VE HAD NEW MEMBERS OVER THE COURSE OF THE YEAR AND PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DIP IN AND OUT WHEN OTHER COMMITMENTS HAVE TAKEN OVER. SO FAR, THEY ALWAYS COME BACK!

THE CLUB NOW COMPRISES STUDENTS RANGING FROM YEAR 7 TO YEAR 11, PLUS A COUPLE OF MEMBERS OF STAFF TOO.

I CAN'T SPEAK FOR THE GROUP, BUT THIS CLUB HAS COME TO BE ONE OF THE HIGHLIGHTS OF MY WEEK. IT HAS BEEN A REAL JOY TO SEE HOW EVERYONE'S WRITING HAS DEVELOPED OVER THE LAST YEAR.

I'M HONOURED TO BE ABLE TO PRESENT SOME OF THEIR BEST WORK HERE. I HOPE YOU ENJOY READING THIS COLLECTION AS MUCH AS I ENJOYED BEING PART OF IT.

CAROLINE GREEN
WRITER IN RESIDENCE, EAST BARNET SCHOOL

CREATING CHARACTERS

WE SPENT SEVERAL WEEKS LOOKING AT CHARACTERISATION IN FICTION AND EXPLORED THE DIFFERENT WAYS YOU CAN BRING YOUR CHARACTERS TO LIFE. THE GOAL IS TO CREATE CHARACTERS THAT LEAP OFF THE PAGE AND FEEL 'REAL' TO THE READER. TECHNIQUES INCLUDED CREATING PROFILES THROUGH QUESTIONNAIRES AND WRITING CHARACTER SKETCHES THROUGH A SERIES OF WRITING PROMPTS.

I ASKED THE GROUP TO IMAGINE THEY WERE IN A VARIETY OF SITUATIONS, WRITING THROUGH THAT CHARACTER'S EYES.

JENNY'S TASK WAS TO WRITE ABOUT SOMEONE WHO HAD JUST WON THE LOTTERY. BUT THERE'S A STING IN THE TALE...

Well, I wasn't expecting that. I stare at the numbers on the screen, then the ones on the ticket, then back again. Back and forth, back and forth. I keep expecting them to change suddenly, that this was just a giant, pathetic joke my mind had played on me. But no, they stay the same.

And I sit there, knowing that if I think about what this means, I might just pass out. No more dingy flat with barely enough room to lie straight in. No more working for hours on end in a silly little shop just to make ends meet. I could actually do something I wanted to, like get a flat with a studio and start painting, reawaken a life-long dream to be an artist.

I need a proper think about this, even though I want to run around screaming like a five-year-old, jumping up and down to annoy the neighbours. It's so exciting! In a bit of a haze, I put the ticket on the window sill, just for a moment. But it is the middle of summer and like anyone else, I have the windows wide open. A little too late I reached for it and watched in dismay as the wind snatched it from my fingers, along with my dreams.

CHRISTINE WROTE A PIECE AS A GIRL WHO WANTS TO APPEAR ON THE X FACTOR. UNFORTUNATELY, SHE IS RATHER DELUDED ABOUT HER TALENTS! I THOUGHT THIS PIECE WAS VERY FUNNY.

I don't get it! Why won't anyone give me a straight answer? All I ever do is sing and I know I'm good because Molly said I was, and Molly is my best friend in the whole wide world and she never lies.

Just lately I've been thinking I should go on the X Factor. I know I can do it. I've got the talent but whenever I ask people what they think, they get all shifty and never answer the question. I guess they're just jealous and worried I'll become all famous and their lives will be ruined by paparazzi forever asking about me...

Maybe I shouldn't go on the X Factor after all. I mean, I don't want to subject my friends to all that publicity and then hate me for the rest of my life. But it's my passion. I was born to sing. The other day I was singing my own version of 'Umbrella' and the window pane cracked! And I saw a science programme with opera singers who made wine glasses smash on the highest notes.

My brother gave me a recorder for my birthday. He said it was so I'd be able to capture my voice and hear how hauntingly it sounds like the world's best singers. At least... he said something about ghosts and haunting. He's so sweet and supportive. But yesterday I was practising for my audition and when I played it back it sounded like a dying cat who had swallowed a toad. I think it's broken.

Weird.

I hate technology.

LILY DID A GREAT JOB OF GETTING INSIDE THE HEAD OF THE LEAD SINGER
OF A BAND WHO LOSES HIS VOICE THE NIGHT BEFORE A MAJOR GIG.

I feel sick. My head's spinning and I can feel the blood pounding in my ears.

It's only a stupid gig. Tony can sing instead. I feel like such an idiot. I can't believe I'm acting so stupidly. At least it's the night before. At least no one can see me... a wreck of nerves. I'm on the verge of tears. It's not fair on me or the others.

*It's our one chance to get noticed and to be admired and I destroy it. I'm blubbing now like a baby, small and helpless. Hot, salty tears are dripping down my long nose and I feel ashamed. Maybe lost voices can come back overnight? If Tony or Mark could sing, I know the guitar music. But what if I make a mistake? Oh, what am I going to do? A fat tear tolls down my cheek and plops onto the blue carpet.
Splat.*

A mess, just like me.

A SENSE OF PLACE

STRONG SETTINGS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN FICTION. WHEN A PARTICULAR LOCATION IS PAINTED VIVIDLY ENOUGH, IT ALMOST BECOMES A CHARACTER IN ITS OWN RIGHT. WE LOOKED AT CREATING SETTINGS OVER SEVERAL WEEKS. EXERCISES RANGED FROM DESCRIPTIONS OF PLACES THAT WERE IMPORTANT ON A PERSONAL LEVEL, TO A FUN GAME WHERE WE HAD TO THINK UP AS MANY VIVID DETAILS AS POSSIBLE ABOUT A BEACH SHOP, RACING AGAINST THE CLOCK.

I ALSO GAVE THE GROUP SOME WRITING PROMPT SUGGESTIONS...

ALEX WROTE A PIECE ABOUT A SHOPPING CENTRE AFTER EVERYONE ELSE HAS LEFT. I THOUGHT IT VERY ATMOSPHERIC.

Steps from my own two feet start to spook me out as I walk across the solid shiny floor. The window panels of each shop show how empty and deserted they are after closing time.

Clothes cling onto a plastic model, whilst the model seems to glare down at me with an emotionless face. It's certainly weird walking down an empty but glamorous corridor, shining bright and squeaky clean before being trampled on by rushing members of the public in desperate need of the newest watch, video game, fashion trend... or whatever is growing like wildfire in the heated hype.'

MIA WROTE A PIECE ABOUT SNUDDLING INTO A CUPBOARD IN A HOUSE SHE LIVED IN WHEN YOUNGER. A SENSE OF HOW COMFORTING THIS PLACE WAS TO HER REALLY COMES ACROSS IN HER DESCRIPTION.

The small space that smells of freshly cleaned clothes rushes past me as I open the door. I push past hangers to the right and make a comfy back rest. I chuck a fluffy pillow on the floor of the cupboard and slump slowly into comforting, compact space.

I have to open the door now and then, due to the area getting too warm and turning into an oven. My dog occasionally comes in to sit with me and even though it's dark, my eyes have adjusted to the little light inside.

AS PART OF OUR WORK ON SETTINGS, I GOT THE STUDENTS TO IMAGINE THEY WERE EYE WITNESSES TO IMPORTANT HISTORICAL EVENTS. I WANTED THEM TO PORTRAY HOW IT MAY HAVE FELT TO BE PART OF SOMETHING DRAMATIC AND POSSIBLY FRIGHTENING, USING ALL THEIR SENSES.

CHRISTINE WROTE THIS POWERFUL PIECE ABOUT THE SOWETO MASSACRE IN 1976, WHEN 600 PROTESTORS WERE KILLED BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN AUTHORITIES.

The children are singing. Their songs run strong through the streets of Soweto.

Their feet, bare and dusty hit the dirt roads sounding like drums matching the passion in their hearts. The men shuffle in agitation and fear. Grown men struck pale by the thought of children. Hundreds of children wanting to say something, wanting to be heard.

There are mutterings and curses shooting between the lines of men like bullets ricocheting on statues. Sweat drips down the marble facets of the soldier's faces.

The sun burns down, fiery and hot like the children's defiance. They come. In ragged stitches of clothes they come. Their skin shines, their feet stomp and dance to a passionate song not of our tongue. They are singing. Not our songs but theirs, Xhosa songs that have their roots buried in time. The songs tell of sadness and of restraint. They come.

They stand before us dancing, singing, chanting. The men tense.

Afrikaans is the language of oppression the children say, and their dance echoes their words.

The men raise their guns, their eyes fierce and cold.

Red.

Red floods the street like the setting African sun.

And the song once clear and true fades in the screaming of the wind.



WORLD BUILDING

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A FAN OF SCIENCE FICTION TO APPRECIATE THE SKILL INVOLVED IN CREATING 'OTHER WORLDS' OR REALITIES. I GOT THE GROUP THINKING ABOUT THIS TOPIC AND WAS FASCINATED TO DISCOVER THAT SOME OF THE BEST WORK CAME FROM THOSE WHO REALLY DIDN'T 'GET ON' WITH THIS GENRE OF FICTION.

FOR EXAMPLE, TEACHING ASSISTANT TRUDY NEWMAN-HART CAME UP WITH THIS HIGHLY IMAGINATIVE AND INTRIGUING PIECE.

Shards of bright light stare at me in rows like daggers at the start of a battle ground. Tentatively I open my eyes wide enough to see tall, dusty buildings covered with wire fencing, men in military clothing, quietly pacing up and down like ants in a row.

Several men carrying large guns, marching precisely, each step at a time. Heavy vehicles, big enough to house 100 men dressed with metal chains around the wheels, clunking as they move along. The quietness is deafening, the palms of my hands damp and my breath shallow with fright as my heart races.

Where am I? How did I get here? Have I just plunged into another time zone like Alice in Wonderland did, travelling to another destiny unknown to human kind?

Am I truly lost? No, I am merely stuck. Right now there seems to be no way forward, my escape too far too complex to complete. I will rest here a while and find my way out just like the ants have. My journey, unknown, may be long but I will fight. I will stay strong. I will never give up.

LUKE, OUR RESIDENT HORROR BUFF, WROTE A PIECE THAT HAD A REAL FILMIC QUALITY TO IT.

The New Species

'Magnificent, isn't it?'

I awoke at the sound of a voice. I looked around, barely seeing anything for almost all was shrouded in darkness.

'Yes, Mr Gartry, it certainly is.'

At the sound of the voice my vision intensified. I could make out two people staring at me and two others standing with what appeared to be machine guns in the background.

I looked down at my body and found tears coming to my eyes at the sight. My body had lost its creamy whiteness and was now the colour of a raincloud on a gloomy day. My nails appeared to have extended into claws with sharp as a blade tips and my teeth felt strange as well. Now I thought about it, I couldn't feel my hair...

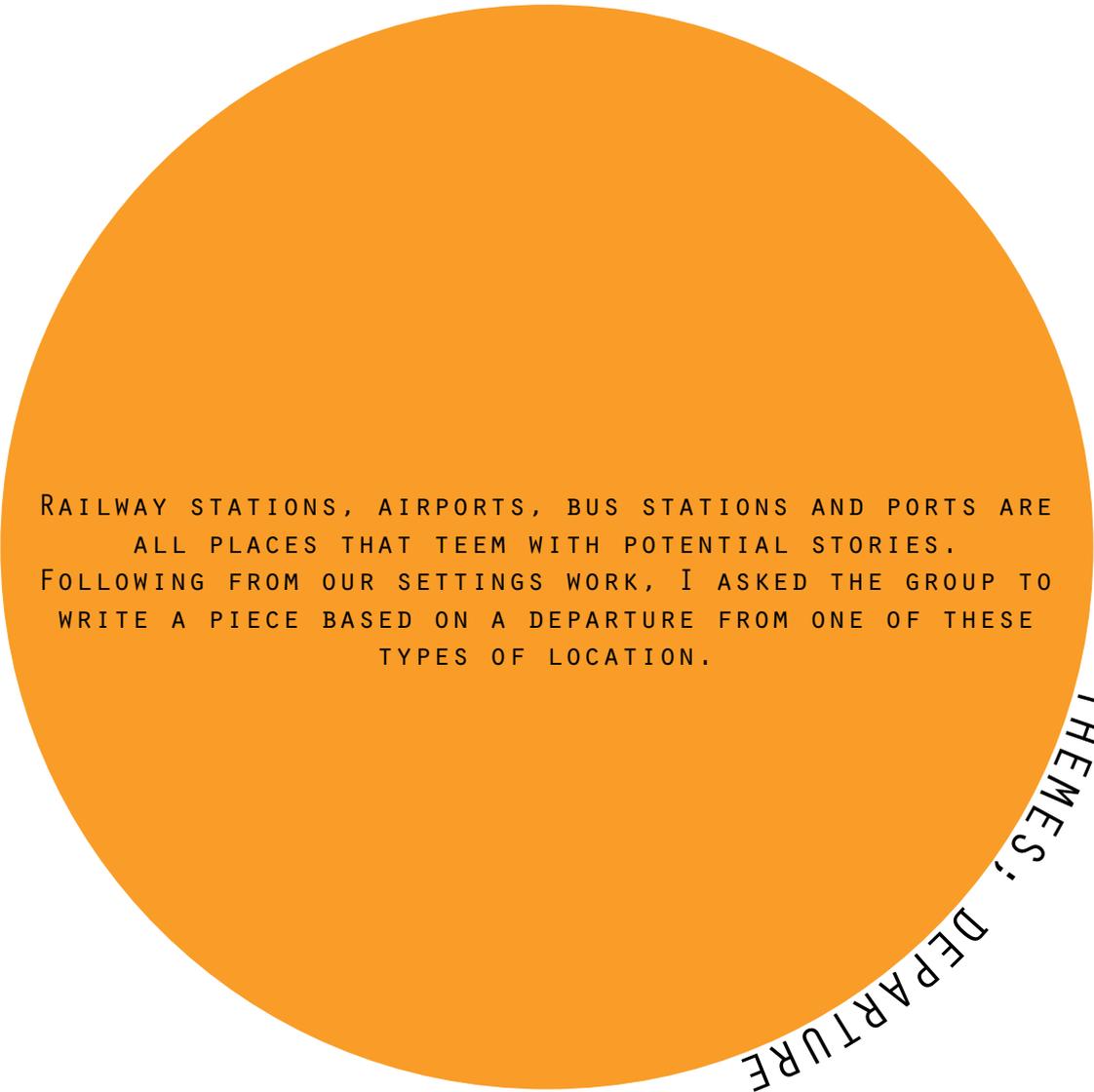
One of the men came up the test tube prison and pressed his hand against the class, smiling.

'What was his name?' he asked.

BEN ALSO CREATED A STRONG PIECE ON THIS TOPIC.

I woke up in a snowy field, not knowing anything, not knowing anyone. Who I was. Where I came from. What I was. All I knew was that I had to escape the dark creatures. Every night, I have dreams of them, the ones who roam the woods. The ones who, in my dreams, change me, replace parts of my body and give me unknown drugs. I always wake upon that field.

But one night, my nightmare got really bad. I woke up and a dark creature was holding me down. I flung him off and ran, so fast I didn't realise I was running into an iced pond. I fell straight in and thought I was dead. But I felt alive, more alive than ever before. The dark creatures came up to the pool and their hands changed into guns they pointed at me.



RAILWAY STATIONS, AIRPORTS, BUS STATIONS AND PORTS ARE
ALL PLACES THAT TEEM WITH POTENTIAL STORIES.
FOLLOWING FROM OUR SETTINGS WORK, I ASKED THE GROUP TO
WRITE A PIECE BASED ON A DEPARTURE FROM ONE OF THESE
TYPES OF LOCATION.

THEMES: DEPARTURE

ROWAN'S WORK WAS EXTREMELY POWERFUL I THOUGHT, AND CONTAINED SURPRISES I DIDN'T SEE COMING AT ALL.

The train let out a loud noise. A horn. But to me it sounded like a scream over the heartbeat thumping in my head. Sweat poured down my forehead. Maria smiled her beautiful smile, even though we both knew it was fake.

Her chin trembled slightly as the train pulled out from the platform, soot floating upwards in a puff as the wheels jolted like they were deciding whether they actually wanted to go or not. Unfortunately the odds weren't in my favour.

I watched the others in the carriage. They clung to each other, terrified, crying. The slightly rotten wooden panels under my feet shook as the train gained speed. Even though it had been years since I'd seen Maria, knowing this was the last time made me sick to the pit of my stomach.

I looked to my left. The other officers looked emotionless. I saw the back of the train. The last rusty carriage travelled by. All I could see was the faded word, AUSCHWITZ printed on the back.

Goodbye Maria.

ANDREW WROTE A POIGNANT PIECE THAT WAS RICH WITH DESCRIPTION.

He was running, hoping he would be in time. The frosted ground still glistened as the sun bounced off it with white, creeping vines. His breath, hot on his face. He burst through it like an athlete through the smoke of the starter's pistol. He got through the tall pearly doors of the station and was set aback by the number of people here so early.

He looked around with a feeling time flowing past him, like a cruel egg timer of destiny. His face was pale because he thought his efforts were futile but he was pushed on by the fact he knew he needed to say goodbye.

He reached the platform and saw through the steamed glass that she was sitting in the carriage with her coffee, the grey rails a contrast to the cyan sky. With a symphony of hisses the train crawled into action leaving him behind staring as her carriage left him.

Like a splinter in his mind he was left waiting, drowning in a sea of people. He froze and life went on without him until finally he realised she was gone and he would never find out the answer.

THE TONE WAS LIGHTENED A LITTLE BY JENNY'S TAKE ON THE SUBJECT. THIS ILLUSTRATED A HAPPIER KIND OF DEPARTURE, ALBEIT FOR A VERY NERVOUS TRAVELLER!

I've never been alone before. Every time I've been on a plane there has been someone with me.

Now I'm sitting here strapped in about to go halfway across the world with no one to keep me company. 'Go back packing in Australia!' they said, 'you'll never get another chance like this!' they said.

My feet are heavy the whole time today, like they are reluctant to leave the ground. They announce my flight and I swallow a cold, hard lump of fear, take my seat and settle down for twelve long hours of hell.

ARGHH! I just heard a noise! It's going to explode, isn't it? Oh, the guy next to me says it's just a gear changing. Hmm. I don't think I want to stay on this flight alone. Maybe this guy will talk to me?

WHERE DO IDEAS COME FROM?

PEOPLE OFTEN ASK THIS QUESTION AND THE ANSWER IS THAT
THEY CAN COME FROM JUST ABOUT ANYWHERE.

ONE WAY IS TO USE STORY PROMPTS. I ASKED THE GROUP
ONE DAY TO IMAGINE THEY HAD FOUND A LUMP OF GOLD IN THE
BACK GARDEN.

I LIKED THE ORIGINAL WAY MICHAEL HANDLED THE TOPIC.

Steve was digging a little allotment in his garden. He preferred home-grown food to the preservative-smothered shop-bought stuff. The ground was dry and hard and he was having trouble digging. He could feel the sweat on his forehead.

As he shoved the spade into the mud it made a metallic sound...the sound made when metal rocks hit each other. Steve narrowed his eyes in confusion. He tapped the object a couple of times to make sure he wasn't losing his marbles. But there was still the strange metallic sound. He just managed to fit his hands into the gap the spade made and pulled the object out. Then he wiped the mud off it with his sleeve.

A perfect reflection of him appeared on a shiny, majestic, fist sized block of gold. He stared at it, amazed. When he came to terms with the fact that he was holding a block of gold he ran inside to tell his wife.

But he stopped mid-track.

She would try to steal it from him in jealousy, running off to claim the money for herself. 'No, that's preposterous,' he said to himself and carried on walking. He went through the door to find his wife sitting on the couch reading the newspaper.

'You will not believe what just happened!' Steve said enthusiastically.

'Let me guess, you were doing some digging in the garden and found a block of gold?'

Steve was shocked.

'How... how did you know?'

His wife slowly picked up her handbag to reveal half a dozen blocks of gold.

'They're everywhere,' she said, continuing reading her newspaper.

ALEX WROTE A PIECE BASED ABOUT A DATE WHERE ONE PERSON WANTS TO BREAK UP WITH THE OTHER.

Unfortunate date.

The pair heavily trudged through the glowing atmosphere of the modern-day fairground. Sun rays beamed down as if a king and its ever so glorious queen had complete control over the weather, using the light rays beaming upon their figures to announce their arrivals. As one they are strong.

Or so she would've wished. Charlotte kept her thoughts to herself, all in desperate attempts to remain happy for today, as well as for her boyfriend Danny.

He had insisted rather excitedly that they should have a fairground date. Danny grew more and more enthusiastic about the plan with each coming day but Charlotte on the other hand, found the idea to be....cringe-worthy to say the least. A date there to her seemed completely ridiculous. It may have been for couples below the age of 17 but for a couple that's over the age of 30, it seemed certainly a lot more suspicious rather than romantic. Not that it completely phased Danny at all.

Their opposites as a couple showed as clear as day both in looks and personality. Charlotte wore plenty of make-up wherever she went. She had a classy appearance and was someone with a fairly smooth and easy social life whereas Danny had complete difficulties in socialising. He was often described as 'the awkward gangly one' from guests and friends alike. That and his messy choice of clothing didn't help but contribute to their differences.

A big, clammy palm grasped Charlotte's own, sending a horrified shiver down her spine, her eyelids shut tight. After an awkward shuffle or so later, Danny shot a few sickly puppy eyed looks as well as weak sweet talk and pet names she did not mentally accept.

'Candyfloss, love? It's as sweet as you are.'

An eager toothy smile beamed from his scrawny, bony little face. Charlotte had just about reached critical point. Taking a lump of candyfloss in between his thumb and finger, he popped the piece into her mouth, forcing her to despise him and this wretched date. The last thing she wanted to do in was to act like a brainless, sappy couple, unable to pull eyes and lips away from each other, like there was a desperate need for oxygen.

That's it, that's enough, she thought. One more moment of this and I'm going to burst in rage.

After forcing herself to swallow the heavy lump of muck and sugar she spoke.

'Listen. We really need to talk.'

THE FINAL COUPLE OF LINES HERE REALLY HAD AN IMPACT AND OPENED UP POSSIBILITIES FOR AN INTERESTING STORY.

PHYSICAL OBJECTS CAN ALSO HELP GENERATE IDEAS. ONE WEEK, I TOOK A BAG CONTAINING A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT ITEMS INTO THE GROUP AND ASKED EACH PERSON TO TAKE ONE OUT. THEN I WANTED EVERYONE TO WRITE A SCENARIO INSPIRED BY THAT OBJECT.

MIA TOOK OUT A STONE AND THEN WROTE THIS QUITE CHILLING PIECE.

Any other day, he would have just walked past it. I mean, it was just a stone, right? But today he was mad. He needed to smash something. Didn't care what. He just wanted to hurt something the way Bill had hurt him.

Dave looked down. It was just a normal stone... but something wasn't right. Middle of a field? How'd it get there?

He picked it up. Good weight. Could probably smash a bus shelter with this. As Dave moved it around in his hands he kept walking. He got to the bus stop and raised his arm ready to release it.

Then he looked at it. His hand was red.

Blood.

It wasn't Dave's. He didn't have a cut. The blood was on the rock. He looked down at it. 'M.H.' was engraved on the bottom where the blood had come from...'

LILY LINKED TWO OF THE OBJECTS FROM THE BAG; A TOY ROCKET AND AN OLD CRICKET BALL.

Henry felt the cold, slippery mud squashed up to his face. He felt the sharp slivers of glass cutting into his soft flesh, the ruined remains of his water bottle.

'Wimp', one of the boys jeered, kicking at the toy rocket that lay at his side. The boy's hard boot shattered the soft metal of the rocket. Henry felt hot tears come to his eyes and his nose grew snotty. Super Apollo 87 was destroyed, his favourite ever toy. Without Apollo he could never become an astronaut and be the first man on Mars.

Someone knelt down beside him, panting heavily. 'Get up, Henry,' the person said gruffly.

'Nooo!' he wailed. 'They broke Apollo.'

He heard the boy shuffling over. 'Oh, Henry, I'm sorry, we'll get you a new Apollo.'

'It won't be the same, David,' he cried. 'I can never be the first man on Mars.'

'Look, Henry, let's talk later, I need to get back to the lads. Come and play cricket with us otherwise those boys will call you a baby.'

He hauled Henry up and swiped at the mud on his face. 'Here,' he said. 'You can be bowler.'

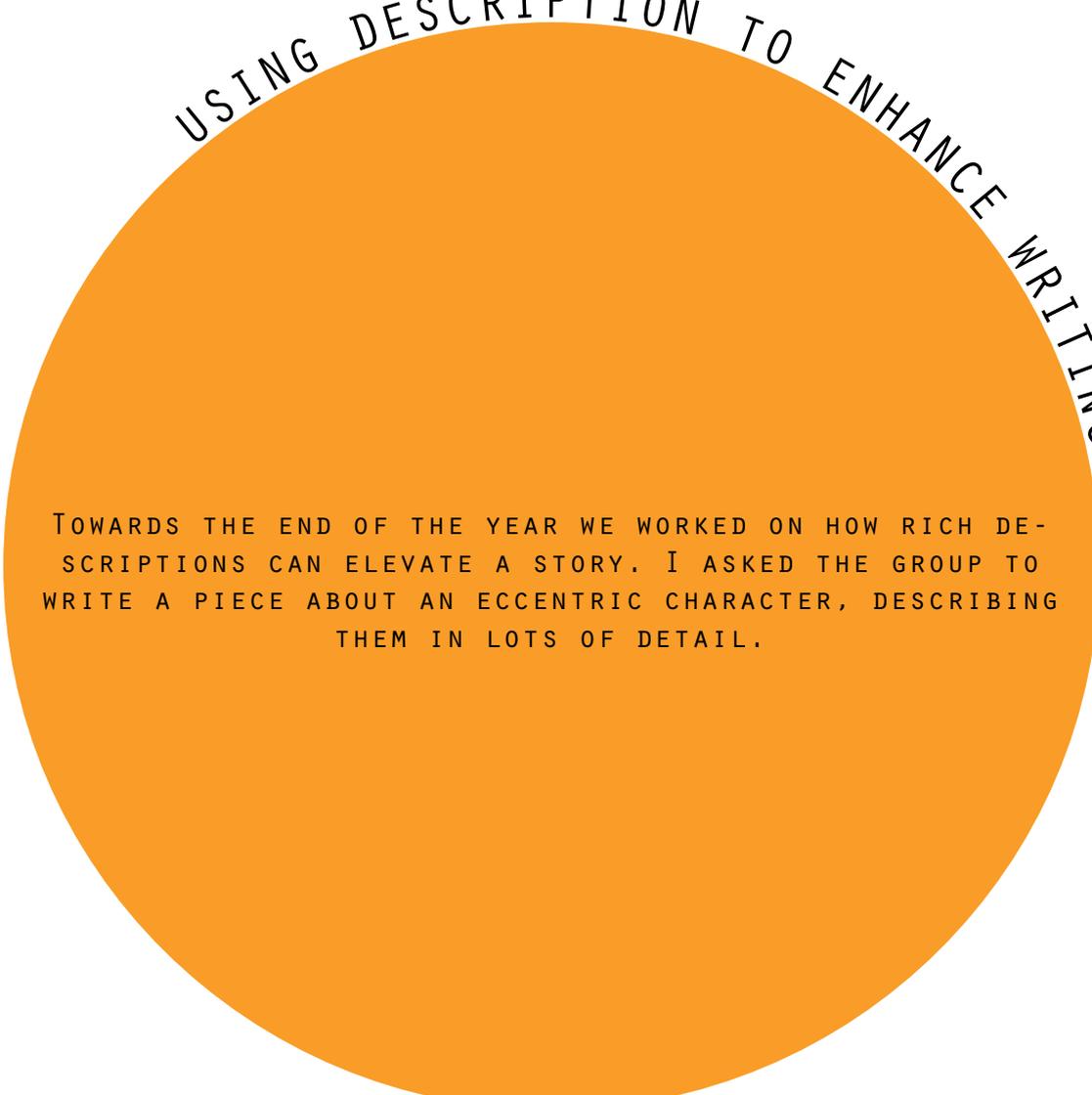
He handed Henry a worn, red cricket ball. Henry's face lit up.

'It's Mars!' he shouted ecstatically.

'Henry, it's a...' David tried to tell him.

'No, it's Mars, David. I did find it! And look!' he yelled snatching at the broken Super Apollo 87. 'It isn't broken; it's just in two pieces!'

Henry snatched the ball and ran off, screaming happily.



USING DESCRIPTION TO ENHANCE WRITING

TOWARDS THE END OF THE YEAR WE WORKED ON HOW RICH DESCRIPTIONS CAN ELEVATE A STORY. I ASKED THE GROUP TO WRITE A PIECE ABOUT AN ECCENTRIC CHARACTER, DESCRIBING THEM IN LOTS OF DETAIL.

LILY WROTE A PIECE THAT I FELT REALLY FLEW OFF THE PAGE.

He was a strange man. Dark, greasy hair hung down to his shoulders, hiding a pale, spotted face and beaky nose. A grubby, black puffa jacket covered most of his body.

The pockets bulged with mysterious, clanking objects. A filthy veil, attached to luminous orange headphones, obscured most of his face, it hung limply like a bee-keepers hat. The man's worn laces thwacked gently against the pavement of the deserted road. In his left hand he clutched a black plastic briefcase, in the right a long, metal pole secured together with rusty nuts and bolts. A drooping flannel hung feebly on the end of it.

The man emitted peculiar grunting noises as I passed, almost as if he was talking to himself. He probably was. Suddenly he stopped walking, his pale white hand propped the briefcase against the low brick wall bordering the house beside him. Long, spindly fingers probed inside into one of many pockets and drew out a small, black metal capsule. He flipped open the lid with a stained, yellow fingernail and carefully shook out a cluster of dark purple tablets.

Placing one on the wall, he bent down and flicked it to a random spot on the road with a look of intense concentration on his face. A tablet clattered onto the tarmac, the sound reverberating through the silent street. He took a second tablet tapped it against his teeth then crunched it in his mouth. A few seconds passed before he swayed and slumped against the garden wall. His eyes had a glazed look and a tiny trickle of drool dribbled from the corner of his mouth. I didn't want to look so I ran, trying not to think about the man. Was he unconscious, faking it or... dead?

Sitting on the worn and thread-bare couch, I watch my grandfather. His balding head covered in small, fluffy patches of cotton white hair. Here and there are bits of peeling skin, giving testimony to the hours of sitting on the beach that he does on a daily basis.

He lights up another cigarette. I don't think I've ever seen him without one in his hand. The air fills up with the cloying smell of burnt tar that stings my throat and makes my eyes water.

"Tea?" He asks, a boyish grin on his face; the wrinkles on his cheeks so like ripples on the surface of a pond. The smile reveals a set of crooked and stained teeth, like a line of dilapidated beach houses.

When I reply that I would like some tea he gives no indication of moving. Instead, he puts out his cigarette and lights up a new one and then asks me if I would be so kind as to make him some too while I'm at it.

He leans back in his old reclining chair, producing a groan, whether from the chair or him, I could not tell.

I go into the mildewed kitchen and search the vomit yellow cupboards for mugs. When I find them, I half wish that I hadn't looked. The bottoms are lined with a green-grey slime, a mixture of old tea, un-rinsed dish soap and cigarette ash. I clean the mugs, trying to resist cringing and then make tea. I return to find my grandfather, draped up on his chair like an old, wet sock. Fast asleep, cigarette in hand, still smoking away into oblivion.

BEN WROTE ABOUT THE SURROUNDINGS OF A HOMELESS MAN THAT REALLY CAPTURED THE GRIM ENVIRONMENT.

Around the homeless man

Under the bridge lay the homeless man. Sitting there in the darkness, lonely. Dust fell from the sky lying gently on the ground. A blue train rushed away over the arched bridge and water dribbled slowly from the top, rattled down and dribbled down his shaggy shirt.

A gang of boys were walking under the bridge and one of the members kicked a mouthful size of mud at the old man, which hit him in the face and slowly fell on to his dirty lap. The gang laughed and as one of the others kicked him another blue train went across the bridge, which made it rattle.

His dirty red sleeping bag, which he had stolen from Sainsbury's, was old, ragged and covered in mould, water and bits of brown dirt. A large spider with hairy legs crept silently across his dirty, ripped, bleeding trousers.

The man's lips were dry and cracked deeply and his eyes were a lovely shade of green. He always stared into the distance like he was dead. His stubby beard was covered in dirt and his crusty skin was burnt below the left eye, over the bridge on his broken nose and by the right side of his lips.

Lots of short, burnt out black cigarettes lay all over the floor around the man. The lighter was on the top of his sleeping bag. On the other side of the dirty bridge were a few spray cans and a rude word on the wall, along with pictures too stupid to describe.

On the right hand side of the bridge was a still river where brown water lay. A red train went across the bridge and a metal bar fell from the top of the bridge and fell on the spray cans.

TRUDY'S PIECE HAS A CONTRASTING, HAPPY FEEL BUT IS ALSO RICHLY DESCRIBED.

Halloween

Yes! It was that time of year again. Three days before Halloween.

I am up in the loft dusting off my precious boxes in preparation for the 31st; my most favourite time of the year. Adrenaline races immediately as I set eyes on the vampire bats neatly tucked away in the corner of the dusty attic squashed next to the skull, still stained with blood from last year's party. A quiver runs down my spine as I catch sight of a massive real spider's web nestling in the corner. Why oh why did you not take up residence in my lounge? You would surely have been my main attraction this year.

Beautiful shiny threads glistening in the distance reminds me of the crisp shards hanging on a snowy day in winter. Still out of breath from trips in and out of the loft the family gather together as we all start shredding bin bags to cover the walls, doors, ceiling.

It's a pretty spectacular sight. A variety of spiders, goblins, monsters and slimy eyeballs join a life size coffin lovingly constructed by my husband for my birthday treat, which is carefully perched with pride next to the dressed table.

One final job; place the withered stained skeleton hand dripping with fresh blood at the centre of the table. I can hardly contain my excitement; the spooky music plays in the distance, smoke fills the room a shadow appears "Countess Lesley Lara Lane at your service" Let the fun begin.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND THANKS

WE HOPE YOU HAVE ENJOYED READING THIS
COLLECTION.

ANYONE WITHIN THE EAST BARNET SCHOOL COMMUNITY IS
WELCOME TO JOIN THE CREATIVE WRITING GROUP AT ANY
TIME, SO PLEASE DO COME ALONG TO ROOM 324 ON A THURSDAY
AFTER SCHOOL IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO STRETCH YOUR WRITING
MUSCLES. IT IS A WARM AND FRIENDLY CREATIVE ENVIRONMENT
WHERE PEOPLE OF ALL ABILITIES CAN DEVELOP AND (MOST
IMPORTANTLY) ENJOY WRITING.

THANKS TO MR CHRISTOU FOR THIS REWARDING OPPORTUNITY
TO WORK AT EAST BARNET SCHOOL, TO
MR SECKLEMAN FOR HIS HELP OVER THE YEAR AND TO
KATERINA CHRISTOU FOR ALL HER WORK DESIGNING THIS
BOOKLET.

JUNE 2013.

