

THE
BEST OF THE
CREATIVE
WRITING
CLUB
EAST BARNET WRITERS **2013 - 2014**

INTRODUCTION

It has been my great pleasure to run the after-school Creative Writing Club at East Barnet School for another year.

Since September I've watched my students gain in confidence and develop their skills as we explored many different facets of the writing process. Everyone has come a long way this year, from the beginners in the group to those who have been writing for some time and I am very proud to have worked with each and every student.

One of the aspects of the club that I love most is its broad mix of ages and abilities. Students from Year 7 rub shoulders and share work with those from the upper school, including the Sixth Form. There is an atmosphere of real mutual respect and trust. I am not sure if this is unique in the school, but I do know that is relatively unusual.

Inclusiveness is a key factor in this club. You don't have to be a brilliant writer to join. There are some very talented writers in the group but there are also beginners who are trying their hand at writing

stories for the first time. All that is needed is to be able to enjoy expressing yourself through writing.

Any student (or member of staff!) is welcome to come and try out the club on any given Thursday and there is no commitment to coming every week. As the pressures of exams have taken over the lives of my older students, they have had to dip in and out of the sessions, but everyone is welcome to attend as much or as little as they choose.

I always tell the students, ‘there are no wrong answers here’. My primary aim is that my group will come away with the sense of satisfaction and pleasure that creative writing can bring.

I hope you will enjoy this collection of my favourite writing over the last year. I am very proud of the group for their work and the progress they have made and am looking forward to working with them, and to meeting new group members, in the new school year. And thank you, gang, for making my Thursday afternoons such fun.

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SEPTEMBER SUPERHEROES

We spent a few weeks at the start of term talking about superheroes. Why? Well, I have to confess to being a sucker for a superhero! But more broadly, superheroes are examples of strong characterisation and the topic is a great way to explore that subject in a fun way. After creating their superheroes I asked the students to imagine what it would be like if they suddenly lost their powers.

I woke up screaming. Another nightmare. This time he had got me. He'd ripped off the beautiful pendant my mother had given me so many years ago and taken all my power with it. I stumbled out of bed and down the creaky wooden stairs of my apartment.

I felt strange...somehow different. What was going on? It was almost like the feeling of weakness in my nightmare, but how was that possible? The pendant was in its usual spot. Hanging low on my neck. And then I realised. It wasn't glowing..

I ran to the mirror. What was happening? This had never happened before. Were there batteries that needed to be replaced? Was I still in my nightmare? No, I always knew whether or not I was awake. I made my way down to the kitchen, feeling terrified. I couldn't call someone because nobody knows who I am. I have no mother or father because they were killed a long time ago.

I made breakfast and called in sick at work. I have to stay in all day. I have to figure this out.

As the first building collapsed, I looked the superhero in the eye. I decided enough was enough. But as soon as I launched at him as a tiger something odd happened. I flew straight past him in human form! My left arm was broken. I don't know how this happened as my bones are usually as solid as rock.

And the weirdest thing was, I never decided to come out of my metamorphosed state. The hero suddenly picked me up and threw me as hard as he could at the nearest pile of rocks

Then I was in a dark room with the doctor in front of me. I knew this was a prison. Like lightning I tried to shoot my left arm out at him only to find I could not move it! 'He is awake!' the doctor shouted.' Quick, get the guards!'



INSPIRING FACES

Creating believable characters that readers will care about it is a crucial skill when writing fiction. So we looked at this issue from lots of different angles and one of them was to pick anonymous faces from the internet and make up identities for them. I found this picture online and thought that the girl had a very interesting look.

I'm cold, I'm hungry, I'm weak. And I'm angry.

I live on a hilly mountain no-one has ever heard of in Scotland. I Don't know for how long...but it has been a while. I stick out from the rest, unsurprisingly. My bright blue eyes, long straw-ginger hair and freckled, littered face. What's not helping is my pale skin, which shows that I am ill. It's true but I don't want people shoving their noses in my business.

My stick frame body lies on the sofa, my eyes looking directly at the ceiling fan above. The growling rumble of my stomach interrupts the woman's chat with me. A drained arm tries to secure my demanding stomach.

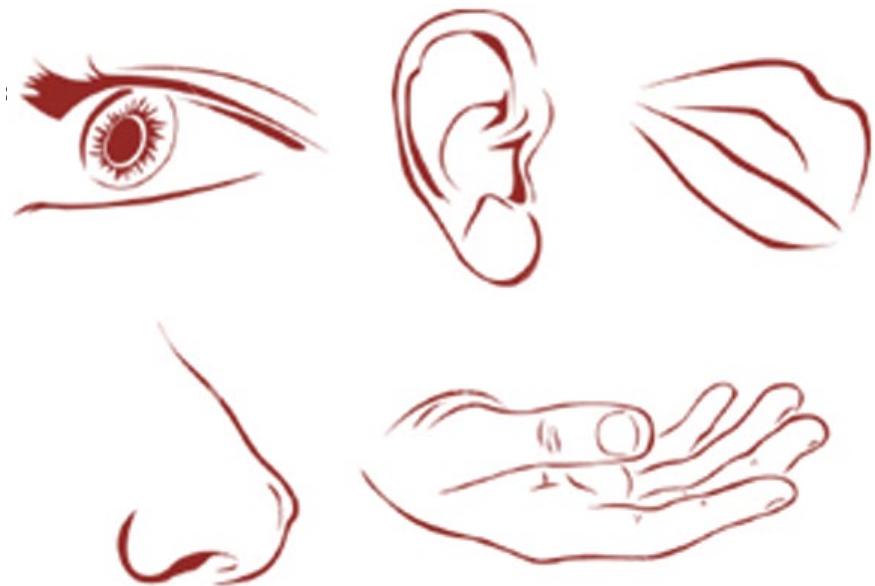
'Miss Amelia,' I hear her groan. 'Try and forget about your mother.' She's killing you,' she pleaded.

That's when my eyes opened. Everything is a blur. I don't need it, I thought.

The icy north winds blustered. The young girl sat on the damp grass, staring into nowhere. Her hair danced about her head like flames threatening to take hold of the dry yellowed grass.

As the wind swept through the highland valleys and hills, a whispered, whistling song played over the loch. It was like the cry of a banshee, Freya thought, as she plucked at the stalks of grass around her.

She didn't feel the November chill; her cheeks were still ablaze with the heat of fury but even that was slowly dying down into cold rage. She pulled her cardigan, the old and tatty maroon wool piece was the only thing her mother had left behind. It smelled like her.



SENSORY WRITING

Bringing all five sense into a piece of writing is something that can really add richness. As a way of exploring sensory writing I asked the group to imagine they were a blind person who was embarking on their first day at a new school.

My mother dropped me off. I know this because the car's roar drew to a close. I hear the click of the door in my left ear as the cold metal walking stick is thrust into my hand.

I climb out and feel the cold rush of air whip around my face, sending a small shiver down my spine. My mother's fingers lace with mine and I'm being pulled somewhere. I don't know where because my world is only limited to one colour: black.

I'm used to it now. The atmosphere around me changes and warm hugs are around me, soft as blankets. The air smells like new shoes and cleaning disinfectant.

Shouting, screaming, footsteps, and music. Like a microphone at my ear. My walking stick firm in my hand sweating with fear. I think I'm at school at the gate or maybe the doors. I don't know where I am! I follow the noise of people chattering.

'Hi,' said a girl's voice. I stop and say, 'Hi,' back.

'Aren't you going to look at me?' she says.

I turn to the right.

'Um..no, left, not right,' she says. I turn to the left.

I walk forward and suddenly fall, collapsing down a hill, face planted in the ground. The noise gets louder and the laughter gets higher.



STRANGE LOCATIONS

Some fictional settings can be so evocative, they almost seem like characters in the story. I set the group the challenge of writing about a 'deserted town' or a 'made up land.' Two of the students produced work that stood out for me.

Far away, there was a deserted town. For a long time there had been rumours about a horseman that haunted the town. Soon everyone had fled. No one ever came anymore. Until now. It was I, Sophia, the clock work, and my sidekick Nathan, the nicklebacker.

It looked spooky when we arrived but that didn't stop us. It was getting dark and I heard howling so hid behind a rock. I looked around and something caught my eye, an odd-shaped creature. It came towards me and I could see the ghost of the horseman. He galloped closer and yelled, 'Who dares enter my town? I am warning you...leave now!'

On the southeast edge of the kingdom, beyond the light and colours of the villages, there is a path. If a soul travels this path, the colours fade away, the trees turn grey and still and the air is heavy with silence.

Eventually they will reach a gargantuan tower called the Castle of the Hidden. It looms in the sky, reaching up with icy tendrils of obsidian stone. It reflects and glitters with light from an unknown source. Its ornate doors are decorated with flower and vines; strangely happy-looking and yet fitting with the desolate atmosphere. That's the strange thing about the castle. Despite its intimidating appearance it seems oddly...inviting. Like silence after deafening noise. The tower is here for the hidden, for souls who want to forget.'

After this, we looked at the subject from a different angle. What if the location of your story was a dilapidated old house, but to your character it was heaven?

He had moved in expecting something he would hate. Somewhere he would despise with his entire being and would rather die painfully than sleep there. That was what Lance Linovich had been expecting.

When he arrived at the address of the old house his parents had bought him tears of happiness began welling up in his eyes. He had expected rays of sunshine that would burn his very skin. He had expected birds to be chirping all the way, to his grim disgust. He had expected a sugary scent that would set his nose melting as if it had been struck by acid.

But no. That was not what stood before him now. Instead it was the house of his dreams. It was exactly what he needed. It would protect him from the earth's burning rays by its layer of almost impenetrable shadow.

What if you liked a run-down house because perfection in buildings was all you had to think about in your working life?

I smile as I walk into the house. Everyone says it's haunted, it's terrifying and why would anyone go in there? But when I see it I smile because I love it here. In fact, every time I visit I sigh with relief that no one has pulled the thing down yet.

I open the creaking door, green paint peeling off it, the pungent scent of damp tickling my nose. It's perfect. It has nothing to do with my life. All my life people look to me for answers, look to me for everything. Being a big shot at the modern architectural works, I have always felt I was carrying a tonne on my back. I feel as if I would make one mistake and something bad would happen.

It has nothing to do with my job, here. I don't have to look around for ideas or inspiration for my work. I can just explore. I tiptoe into the dark gloomy room. And once again I sigh with relief and happiness.



OBJECTS AS STORY PROMPTS

Ideas for writing fiction can come from some surprising sources. A popular workshop revolves around a bag of hidden, random objects, which the students will pick, unseen, and then use as the basis for some writing.

Inearly dropped it today. My heart was in my throat. It is so special, I don't know what I would do if I lost or broke it.

I My wolf ornament was given to me when I was three by my mother and father before they left. It is all I have left. I grew up in a rundown orphanage and when I was six, I ran away into the dark forest and never looked back.

A few days later I found a small village where I stayed for a couple of years living off scraps and then when there weren't any left I would steal. That got me into a lot of trouble and soon I had to leave.

So far in my life, which is only 14 years long, I have been shot at many times and have still managed to stay alive. I believe it is my wolf protecting me and guarding me.



JOURNEYS

The subject of travel is one that is potentially rich with stories. We looked at the ideas of arrivals, departures and the journeys people may take for any number of reasons.

It was my first day going to work. I had about 30 minutes to get there.

The stairs to the tube smelt musty and my left hand, covered in flaky skin, shivered in the cold. I had forgotten to put my cream on. I felt with my right hand the cold metal shaped as a circle to steady myself.

17 minutes.

It was cold and tingly on my fingertips. I tried to keep my nails off it because it made me flinch.

15 mintes.

I got to the bottom of the tall, cream steps and stepped into oblivion. The noise got really loud and the corridor looked like it was getting longer. I shook my head and started to look for the Victoria line.

12 mintes.

I found the correct opening and went through the vast crowd brushing against big coats and handbags. Soon I saw a massive escalator, which made lots of noise.

9 minutes.

Then, more people to get through, more noise. The top of my little finger on my left hand was bleeding rapidly. I hid it in my jacket pocket so nobody could see.

2 minutes.

I got to the station and sat down. Footsteps echoing in my ears with the musty dusty taste on my lips.

No time left.

No time left.

The train came slowly to the dark platform. What seemed like an army came out of it, with the defenders trying to get in the train. I stepped inside and found a seat, sat down and took out a tissue to clean my hand.

I'd never taken the train before. They were loud and hurt my ears. I hated them. That's why I went to the private school. Dad had always taken me in the car. 'Anything but the train,' I always said. He understood. He hated them as well, because of Mum. One day she was going to a sewing thing in Scotland. Two days later there was a news report saying a train to Scotland was bombed by terrorists. We never saw her again.

The only reason I took the train was because I was saving a four hour walk and I didn't want to get up at 3:30 and still be late. I was dead scared. Then suddenly there was a big crash and people screaming. Blood from my ear was landing on my coat. Then there was blackness.

I sat very still. I did not open my eyes. I asked the man next to me, 'What the heck is going on?' He said, 'The train has crashed, the rescue team has not come yet and we have all been here for days.'

'Darn it!' I say, 'I'm late!'

'Well, we're all late, son,' he says.

'First day as well,' I whisper...



GENRES

There is a dizzying array of genres within fiction. We discussed this in the group and while we were all familiar with genres such as crime, romance, humour, science fiction and others, some were a little more elusive to describe! (Nanopunk... anyone?)

ROMANCE

S hawn sits and waits. The coffee aroma had sickened him over time and the assuming looks from others do not help his nerves. He waits, waits and waits.

Fingers fidget, picking anything out that looked out of place. Fiddled his glasses into place, chest tightening, forehead sweating, fast-paced breathing. He thinks he's too needy. Did he come too early? Is this the right cafe? Is this the right Lauren he is seeing?

The sound of a door opening shattered his thoughts and his head snaps up. Heart beating with joy, he can't help but break into a smile.

It was her, soaked from the rain, with an apologetic look on her face. She walks over to him and greets him with a handshake, his hands quivering more than hers.

It's a dumb crush. He's over thirty, but admitting feelings to another human being feels like sky diving against your will. The fear of destroying a friendship cripples him.

She brings out her beloved notebook, grin brimming with excitement. 'Songwriting,' she says simply. 'Need to find words that end in 'ick', and I need to hear them in that English voice of yours Guv'nor.'

He laughs quietly. 'Mock the English, why don't you?'

'You know me well,' she says.

They sit in the corner, writing, talking. He wonders if there are any words that rhyme with, 'I love you.'

DYSTOPIAS

Dystopian fiction is a futuristic genre that often depicts a society that is repressive and corrupt. It is one of my personal favourites and the group also approached the topic with great enthusiasm.

We imagined a world in which touching and eye contact were banned in public, with grave consequences for those caught breaking the law.

Do you ever feel like you're being watched? Do you feel the eyes of another watching your every move?
I do...

I swung open the door of my house and pulled up the grey fabric of my hoodie, so that it hid my eyes from the guards, or the eyes of the streets as society calls them. I decided to brave it and visit my grandmother in the west of town; this journey involves two trains, which I had avoided since the law of No Human Contact was introduced.

I took the steps down the path way, keeping my dull grey eyes focused on the scuffed Converses that I had on. My breath caught in my throat as I felt the heat of the glare from the eyes of streets. I walked quickly to the train shelter and reached the entrance, stopping when I saw the dress shoes of a guard .

‘Name,’ he gruffed out.

‘Jesemai,’ I said quickly my eyes burning a hole on the ground.

‘Number?’ He asked as I heard the writing of pen on paper.

‘0179886,’ I replied from memory.

‘Alright, go in,’ he said and I heard the whir of the gates opening. I raised my head as people were all walking in the same direction, so I didn’t have to worry about the eyes looking at me.

I hurried to my platform and waited for the train. I felt the eyes of someone stare at me and blushed under my hood. The feeling went away until I felt someone brush my hand. I recoiled in horror to see a young man, with deep brown eyes staring at me, making me shiver. I looked around to look for guards but saw none looking at us. I turned back to him and lowered my eyes.

‘I’m Jonas,’ he whispered. ‘Jonas Cunning.’

‘Jesemai Rose,’ I replied staring at the boy’s bare feet. ‘No shoes?’

‘Oh yeah, the eyes of the street took them off me in punishment, they caught me carrying my little sister on my back. Weird punishment if you ask me.’ He laughed softly.

I giggled dryly and heard the train pull up, feeling the whoosh of air as it blew past my face. I got on, Jonas hot on my trail. I didn’t have to see him to feel his gaze. He sat next to me and for once I felt some kind of comfort in a stranger.

It's hard to be alive. And legal. It's hard to look up and avoid making eye contact, it is hard to look down at the floor without bumping into someone. I contact and touching any person is strictly forbidden.

There are snatchers everywhere regarding the school and the shops patrolling the streets once someone in my class she was the first person I have sought to be taken away by the snatchers. Only they can look and touch if they need to. She bumped into someone and all I know is that the snatches tangled her in a net put tape around her eyes shut. It was something that made her unconscious and then they whisked her away.

I see this kind of thing happening more often I spend my whole life living in fear and uncertainty mother has to have permission to pick me up from school or to hug me my parents needed to have permission to have me as long as it was behind close doors and I was the only child they would ever have. Sometimes I sleep and catch my mothers eyes at home. It feels like a crime.

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

As I saw the thick, long tail appear I felt a massive shiver down my spine. I saw the spiky, battered back and a creature who had survived many wars. Then like a massive building crashing down I realised I wasn't fighting an ordinary dragon, I was fighting the very first and last dragon; the quantum omega dragon.

The scarred face of the sacred warrior showed itself in all its treacherous glory with titanic cranes for hands, all covered in rock hard scales. Its hands were covered in blood and it was clear it was looking for more. It felt like a speeding bullet as it thrashed its tail at me and that point I knew it was all over.

Any other dragon would have been fine. Literally any other dragon on this tiny stupid island would have been just fine! But no, my quest had to be to steal from that Dragon, the living smoke, the Pyres Ember, who lives on Hellmurder Hill... or should that be Hellmurder-freaking-volcano?

I would have been able to handle the others. The white, feathered one would have been a piece of cake. It is blind and I could be quick when I need to be. Hell, I would even have taken the moody gold one. He seemed a bit of a git at first but I've seen the way he cares for the younger dragons, especially when they are injured.

I'd never actually seen this one, just heard the stories. I'd heard about his eyes the colour of blood rubies, so fearsome they could blind with a single glance. I sighed and resisted the urge to cry. Might as well get it over with.

It is tall and dressed smartly but something is wrong about it. Something isn't right. Its eyes are almost too vivid, a shade that you can never be sure is green or grey. The teeth, in white and pink gleaming gums, are too straight and too perfect.

Its outline is hazy, slightly blurred, like smeared chalk. Long thin fingers poke out from its sleeves and the hair on its head is cut so short, the colour is uncertain. Its voice is deep, seductive, like coffee in the morning. There is tension in the air and all around. The atmosphere is as taught as a string ready to snap. A flicker dashes across its cheek. It smiles slowly. A smile just like any other but there is something twisted about it. Its irises begin to expand filling the eyes and pulling like molten steel this site is terrible, inhumane. This is a monster..

‘D on’t leave me,’ I whispered but the door was already slamming shut. I felt betrayed, alone. To be perfectly honest, I saw it coming but still...

The beam of light that held me dissipated and the rotary blades of the ship began to spin. The takeoff lights flashed to green as the craft rose and spun up into the night.

Here I was, a researcher, theorist, out in the field. It felt like a banishment.

I scanned my surroundings and tried to take everything in. The ground beneath me was soft, powdery and I felt a moment of alarm that it might collapse under me before I regained my senses.

Our readings had shown that the powder dirt went down deep and below that was a solid dirt that was called rock. I took another step. It felt idiotic, as though I was a youngling learning everything for the first time. The young star this planet orbited was yellow and hot. When I looked away my eyes felt as though they had been burnt and the image of it remained.

SHOWING AND NOT TELLING

The issue of ‘showing and not telling’ is one that has been known to make many an adult writer weep. The best writing helps us to ‘see’ the story unfolding, without everything being described in laborious detail. I asked the group to tackle this subject, by describing a person who is very hungry, without mentioning any words relating to hunger.

A little girl lay hunched over on the side of the road, her eyes wide and sunken. Her cheeks were hollow and her skin had taken on a yellowish tinge. The monster in her stomach growled and groaned .

The girl tried to tell him to go away and bother someone else but a ripping feeling in her belly made her curl in on herself, grunting.

A man strode past, greedily scoffing from a polystyrene container. The girl caught a glimpse of him and wondered how anyone could eat that fast. If she were him she would savour every mouthful, treat it as pure gold.

The girl often distracted herself from the pain by thinking of happy things but her mind was on other topics and she found herself thinking of a slice of pizza. Its rich thick topping, the strands of cheese hanging from her lip, the soft dough, still warm from the oven. Her mouth watered. The spicy hot pepperoni, the fresh crunch of the crust, the greasy tomatoes bursting with flavour.

She could almost taste it. Maybe she could even save a bit for the monster in her stomach to make him go away. Maybe.

“WRITING IS AN AMAZING THING”

Creative Writing is a fun, relaxing way to write down all the ideas and images circling in your head. You can explore different parts of writing and try out different genres and tenses. Over time you can improve your writing and find styles you like. Creative Writing is run by our awesome Author-in-Residence Caroline Green and everyone who attends is interesting and friendly. Listening to their pieces can be inspiring. All the exercises are casual and fun with no wrong answers and no telling off.

Writing is an amazing thing, it is diverse and powerful and by coming to Creative Writing you can be a part of it!

LILY RACHEL 8A

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