

the artistry of

Imaginative Writing

by

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PHOENIX
EDUCATION

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Chapter 1

Aiming for artistry

Permission to play and experiment with writing

All too often students approach writing with trepidation and a reluctance to put pen to paper. We all have the potential to be creative and storytelling is an innate skill, yet too many individuals claim to be unable to write effectively. We need to ensure that we spend time immersing our students in the writing process. All students can write well when they are inspired and feel supported to take risks.

Imaginative writing like the finger paintings we all once did at school is messy. Students need to be reassured that writing in the initial stages is not perfect. It takes time, effort and practice to achieve artistry, and the process is iterative. If students are given the opportunity like great writers to reimagine, redraft and refine their writing, then every student can improve their skills and become increasingly confident and proficient writers.

Students need to be able to play and experiment with the sound, feel, look and meaning of words and the structure and impact of sentences. By crafting a plethora of imaginative pieces from poetry to vignettes through to creative non-fiction, students will begin to enjoy the craft of writing. This can only be achieved if you embed time for writing in your lessons every week. It might only be for a five minutes a day or one lesson a week, but you must be committed to valuing the need for students to have the freedom to explore, take risks and experiment with writing.

Making the time

We need to plan regular opportunities for our students to write imaginatively. We should not confine imaginative writing to a single unit of work or one summative assessment task. If our students are to achieve artistry when they write, then we need to allocate the time.

The imaginative writing activities in the form of mini-lessons that have been included in

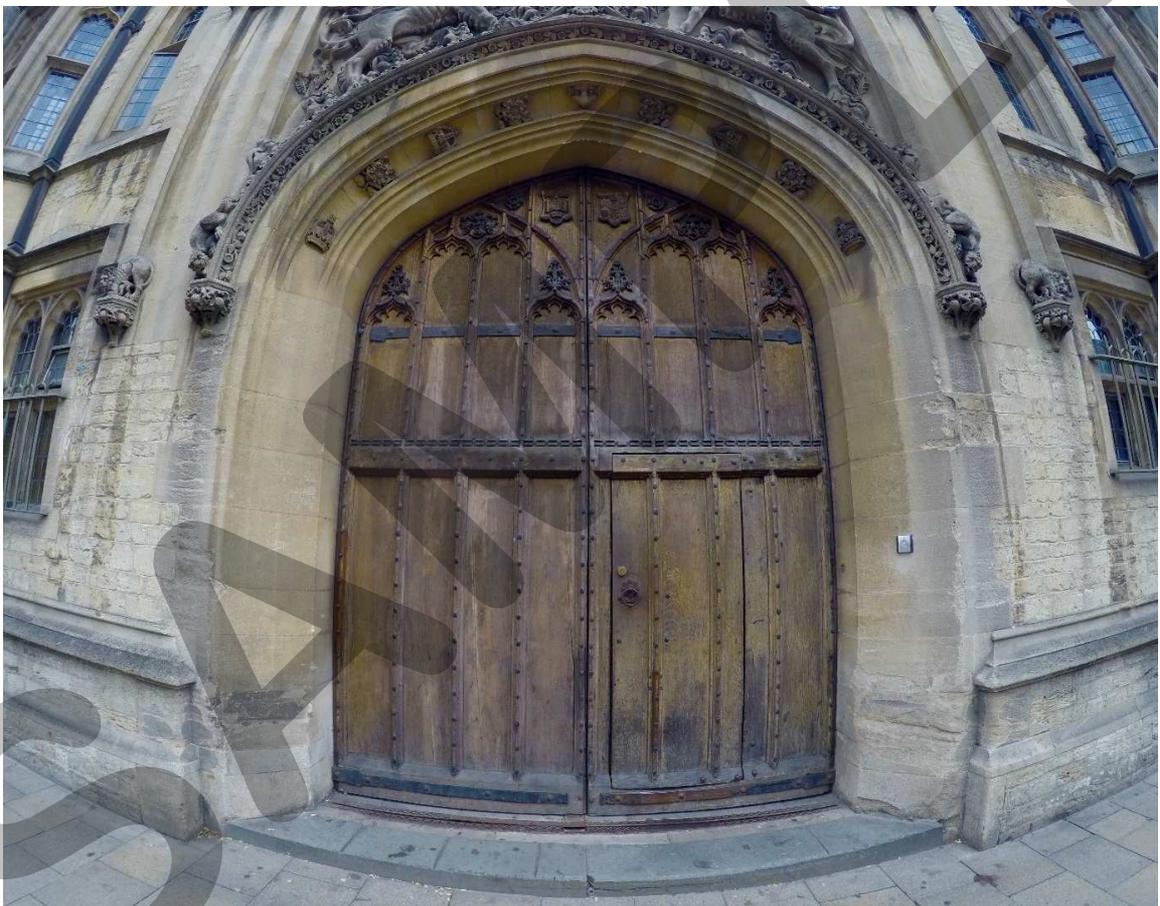
each chapter can take one lesson or as little as 10 minutes. They are designed so that your students are presented with multiple opportunities to immerse themselves in the writing process.

Consider the following approaches to planning time for writing:

1. Five minute micro-writing moments:

At the start of every lesson challenge your students to write for five minutes. You could provide them with a stimulus, such as a photograph, a sentence starter or an object the day before or at the start of the lesson, such as using the following images:

a. What will you find behind the door?



2

b. The hands of time...



c. Where do the tracks take you?



The activity could vary each day and it should be connected to what they are currently studying. The students could then select the piece they believe has the most potential and further develop the writing. Peer marking could be a vital part of the micro-writing process where students in two minutes evaluate another's writing.

The micro-moment can be connected to any topic or concept of the unit of work you are teaching, such as:

A close study of a novel through the concept of literary value provides an ideal opportunity for five minute micro-writing moments. The students could be given an extract from the novel that focuses on setting or a character, and they have five minutes to emulate the style of the writer in a new and familiar setting or for their own original character. Other micro-writing moments could be:

- ~ Re-writing the opening or final paragraph in a novel
- ~ Re-writing the dialogue between two characters
- ~ Writing the interior monologue for a character
- ~ Stealing the best sentences or imagery from the text and incorporating them into a remixed imaginative writing piece
- ~ Re-writing the opening or closing paragraph of a text.

The concept of narrative voice means that your students are already exploring how and why voice is constructed and conveyed in texts, such as in short stories or a novel so the next natural step is to incorporate micro-writing moments focused on students crafting a narrative voice in their own imaginative responses. You could follow the following sequence:

- ~ The first lesson could be trying to capture their own voice through the stream of consciousness about a burning issue or a concern.
- ~ The next lesson, the students add more striking verbs and visceral imagery to the first piece of writing.
- ~ The following lesson, the students create an imaginary character and use the same approach.
- ~ Each day the students reimagine, redraft and refine at the start of the lesson.



As they study how great writers craft voice, such as Harper Lee's memorable creation of Scout's strong and audacious voice, they refine their own original piece. You could teach them about the different ways that writers convey narrative voices, such as through the first person narrator of a character such as Mark Twain's Huck Finn or the third person limited such as George Orwell's Winston Smith, and then get your students to experiment with these different approaches with their own character.

The concept of genre through the study of a film, short stories or novel enables your students to play with conventions, appropriation and form. A fun first micro-writing moment could be rewriting the three little pigs as a western or romance. Another approach could be writing the setting of the opening scene for a

dystopian genre film. Your students could take the place they live in and transform it to reflect the future world they imagine could occur if global warming continues or pollution increases or the threat of terrorism escalates.

2. Sentence of the day

Challenge your students every lesson or by the end of the week to produce an incredible sentence that engages the reader with its striking word choice and potent imagery. Ensure that the sentences are connected to the focus and concept of the unit of work. Each lesson could build on a different aspect of the original sentence by adding challenges, such as using muscular verbs, adding sound through auditory imagery, featuring a beautiful sounding or powerful word or beginning the sentence with a directional preposition. Encourage your students to delight in the sound and meaning of words. Here are some possible approaches for a range of units of work:

- ~ For an **autobiographical or biographical study through the concept of context** the students could compose in the first week a 12-word autobiography of their own lives. Each lesson they begin by refining and sharing the sentence with a peer. At the end of the week, the sentences are shared with the class. During the second week, their challenge is to create a far more compelling and engaging opening sentence for the text they are studying. The following week, the students craft a sentence that describes the person whose autobiography or biography they are studying. Each lesson they play with employing more striking verbs and adjectival phrases.

- ~ **A graphic novel study through the concept of perspectives** necessitates a focus on the use of dialogue and monologues by the characters. Many students struggle with creating effective dialogue so here is an ideal opportunity to build this skill. During the first week, the students take one of the character's sentences and in groups of three take on the challenge of making it more descriptive and engaging. The class can have fun with the collaborative competition of voting for the most effective rewrite. In the second week, the same trio introduce a new character to the graphic novel in a chosen scene. They create six lines of dialogue with one of the original characters.
- ~ **A unit of work focused on imagery** invites the students to experiment with a range of sentences to improve the quality of their descriptive writing. You could use the following sequence:
 - ◇ During week 1, they could experiment with using a range of figurative devices such as lesson one a simile, lesson 2 a metaphor and lesson 3 personification to evoke an image of a special place.
 - ◇ At the end of the week, the students evaluate the device, which was the most evocative.
 - ◇ During the second week, the students play with symbolism and pathetic fallacy to create sophisticated sentences that convey their feelings when they are strolling along a beach and an ominous storm is brewing out to sea.



- ◇ Using binaries and juxtaposition to evoke an image of tension during a summer storm could follow in the third week so that they learn about the power of contrast and nuance.

3 Permission to play with purpose lessons

Imagine the luxury of allocating one lesson a week for students to experiment and play with writing. These lessons would have to be purposeful and integrated meaningfully with the focus and concept of the current unit of work. Even though the students are being given permission to get messy with writing, the lesson needs to be structured and focused. Current research into fostering creativity affirms the need for purpose, structure and guidelines if students are going to have the courage and confidence to take risks and innovate. These lessons could build on each other so that the students redraft and refine their imaginative writing. Include peer editing time so that the students are working collaboratively as fellow writers on a mission to achieve artistry. Students could be encouraged to build a portfolio of their writing. Imagine the joy of having their favourite piece published each term for a wider audience in a class blog or even a bound class book.

Learning from the masters

If our students are to be inspired to write with artistry they need to experience a plethora of quality texts that feature evocative settings, authentic characters, different approaches to form and structure, the rich use of language and meaningful ideas. This must start in the junior years.

We need to remember to encourage our students to delight in the aesthetic and powerful use of language, and read like a writer. When we teach our students to read from the perspective of a writer, they focus less on *what* the writer is trying to say and more on *how* the writer is saying it. Specifically, they look at the form, structure and language the writer is using to convey their message and how the use of language affects them as they experience the text.

Our students are apprentice writers who need to learn from the masters. The poets teach our students about fusing the language into compact and powerful texts that appeal to the senses, embrace lexical density and use form and structure to convey ideas that resonate. The playwrights demonstrate how to play with dialogue to reach an audience and our authors teach the art of storytelling, provocation and characterisation. Photographers and painters provide fertile images that can trigger memories and stimulate ideas. The director teaches students to use verbal cinema to capture the intricate details, provide the back story and a *mise-en-scene* for a character and experiment with form, structure and points of view. The orator reminds students about the power of words, and the musician artfully plays with the sound of words and uses music to stir our emotions and imagination.