



WRITING

THE

GAME

**Football as a gateway
into the imagination**

**A learning resource to develop creative
writing projects with young people**



WRITING THE GAME FOOTBALL AS A GATEWAY INTO THE IMAGINATION

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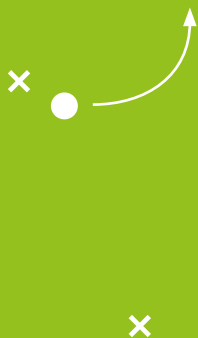
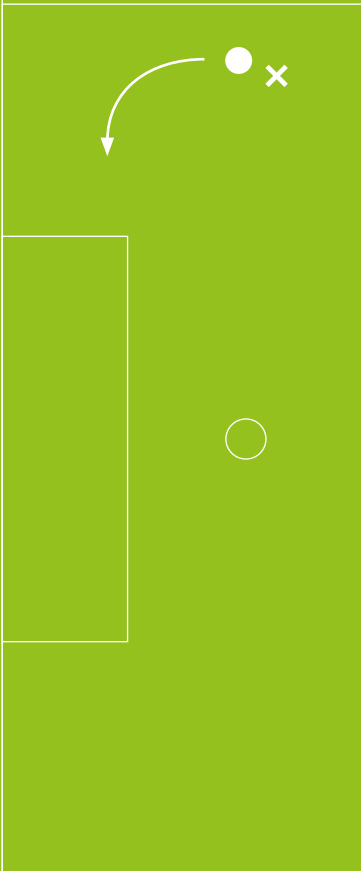
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AT THE TURNSTILES

INTRODUCTION TO WRITING THE GAME

TEAM TALK: ABOUT ARVON

Arvon is a charity that believes creative writing can change lives for the better. Established over 50 years ago by two writers, John Moat and John Fairfax, it is celebrated for its unique ability to discover and develop the writer in everyone. Arvon's work is recognised by Arts Council England for its exceptional quality and it has been described by former Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy as 'the single most important organisation for sharing and exploring creative writing in the UK.' Generations of writers have been inspired by their experience of Arvon.

Arvon's residential courses and retreats take place in our three writing centres in Devon, Shropshire and Yorkshire and offer the perfect environment for creativity to flourish. Led by acclaimed writers, they span every genre of writing and are a powerful mix of high-quality workshops, individual tutorials, and the time and space to write.

A third of Arvon's courses are run in partnership with schools and other arts and community organisations for groups of all ages and backgrounds, including vulnerable and marginalised young people and adults. Arvon's Learning and Participation programme reaches over 500 people each year through our residential courses and an estimated 5,000 through workshops and events in schools, communities and online.

We also work closely with teachers to support their professional development, offering dedicated teacher-writer courses as well as bursaries to help practising teachers to attend writing courses on our public programme. With support from charitable trusts and individual donors, we aim to keep our programmes open to all.

We offer a home for creative writing, where anyone, regardless of writing experience, can step away from their normal routine, immerse themselves in the imagination, be inspired by experienced writers and release their creative potential.

GRANTS FOR TEACHERS

Arvon supports the professional development of practising teachers in the UK, who may apply for a special fixed grant of £200 towards a course fee. Teachers' grants are limited in number and can be applied for in addition to the usual income-based grant if further financial assistance is needed.

For more information about Arvon's work with schools and community groups, see www.arvon.org/learning or contact us on learning@arvon.org





KICKING OFF: WHAT IS WRITING THE GAME?

“Writing the Game has produced lots of serious, silly, brilliant, amazing writing”

Teacher on a Writing the Game course (2014)

Writing the Game harnesses young people’s love of football to engage them in writing and learning. Since 2009, the programme has worked with schools across the country to reach hundreds of young people; transforming their attitudes to writing, unleashing their creativity, building confidence, raising aspirations and opening up opportunities for them within and beyond education.

Writing the Game was originally developed for Arvon in collaboration with the Football Foundation and Paul Hamlyn Foundation by sportswriter Anthony Clavane (*Promised Land, A Yorkshire Tragedy*) and playwright Nick Stimson (*Flying Pigs, The Day We Played Brazil*). Both are football fans and both understand the potential of an Arvon course to unlock creativity and generate enthusiasm for writing. Using the Arvon residential model, they designed a course with football as a framework and young people’s experience at its heart. Over five days at an Arvon writing centre, the course takes students on a writing journey, from football-themed wordplay, through exploring the connections between football, community and identity, to drawing out their creativity, confidence and personal stories. Throughout the week the group participate in workshops and one-to-one tutorials, listen to professional writers read from their work, explore the countryside, cook and eat together – and of course, play football. The week culminates in a celebratory evening, during which each member of the group reads from the work they have produced during the week. Each Writing the Game week runs in partnership with the school’s local football club, who support visits to the ground, arrange opportunities to meet players, and give participants a chance to take part in the Supporter2Reporter programme to enhance speaking and listening skills through becoming sports reporters. Over the years, other writer-tutors have come on board to teach the courses or visit as midweek guests and the collaborative nature of the programme has enabled it to grow and evolve.

This programme specifically targets students who are underachieving, particularly in writing, but whose passion for football has the potential to provide a route to positive change in their lives. In our evaluation of the programme, we found that 95% of participating students felt Writing the Game had improved their writing skills and abilities, including use of English, grammar and vocabulary, creativity and imagination. 100% of teachers who engaged directly with the programme said they had gained a greater understanding of creative writing and the development of more effective teaching strategies.

“THE BENEFITS OF WRITING THE GAME ARE EVIDENT, AND THEY NEEDN’T BE LIMITED TO RESIDENTIAL COURSES.”

Writing the Game projects can work well in school, during lesson time and linked to the existing curriculum, as after-school activities, or alternatively as part of your programme at a youth club, sports club, or other setting where you seek to engage young people. The approaches within Writing the Game lend themselves to developing creative writing across the curriculum; for example, the themes of belonging, community and identity explored in the context of a local football club link to subjects covered in PHSE, Citizenship, English, History, and Geography. 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 subjects¹.

The benefits of Writing the Game are evident, and they needn’t be limited to residential courses. This resource is designed to help you take Writing the Game’s well-honed structure and methods into any space where young people might come to learn or be creative. Reflecting the passions and interests of young people and drawing on Arvon’s values and the creativity of Writing the Game tutors, it is packed full of activities and exercises to inspire students and lead them into the world of their imagination.

¹ Cultural Learning Alliance, Key Research Findings: The Case for Cultural Learning, 2017



THE DINK IN THE CROSSBAR: WHY FOOTBALL?

"Casper, get off those bloody goal posts." Mr Sugden, Kes (Ken Loach, 1969).



Football is the most popular sport in the world. Over 11 million people regularly play the game in England alone. 45 million a year attend matches in the UK. It is the wealthiest sport in the world and for many young people, their greatest dream is to one day become a professional footballer. But football is also about belonging, community and identity: your village, your town, your city, your country, your continent. It's about pride. It's about being part of something.

This was a point made by England manager Gareth Southgate during the 2018 World Cup. In a television interview, he said:

"We have the chance to affect something bigger than ourselves. We are a team, with our diversity and with our youth, that represents modern England. In England we've spent a bit of time being a bit lost as to what our modern identity is and I think, as a team, we represent that modern identity, and hopefully people can connect with us."

Southgate's squad was the most diverse England had ever taken to a World Cup. 11 of the 23 players were black or of mixed heritage. The team also represented an important geographical diversity. Six of the squad were from Yorkshire, hailing from socially disadvantaged and often marginalised communities. Football, as social commentator Sunder Katwala noted, has the potential to become "something, in these polarised times... that can bring us together, celebrated in both small towns and big cities, across generations and social classes".

On a Writing the Game course, football is approached as an expression of a young person's local identity, which is why the partnership with a local football club is so important. For example, one course which brought students from Barnsley to Lumb Bank, The Ted Hughes Arvon Centre in West Yorkshire, saw most of the students at the beginning of the week declare their allegiances to elite clubs like Manchester United, Arsenal, Liverpool and Chelsea; but when they visited Barnsley F.C.'s Oakwell stadium, to be greeted by a large sign sporting the legend "My Town, My Team, My Blood", they began to develop an enormous sense of pride in their local club.

“This course has changed my life.” Student on a Writing the Game course

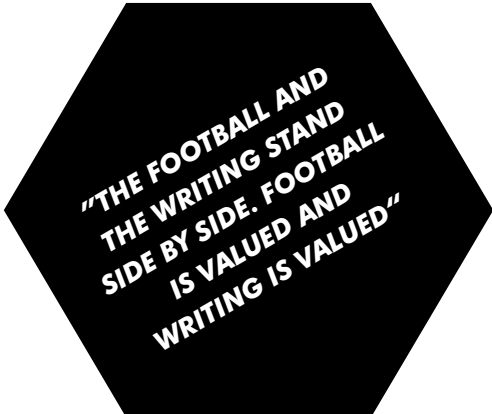
These students happened to attend the school where *Kes*, Ken Loach’s ground-breaking 1969 film, had been shot. Writing the Game is influenced by a famous scene from *Kes*: English teacher Mr Farthing encourages the protagonist, Billy Casper, to talk about his kestrel to the class. For the first time, Billy opens up to his classmates. His passion for his sport – training and flying a kestrel – has led him to public articulacy. It’s a triumphant moment, an epiphany of hope and his classmates listen with rapt attention.

In the film, Casper is written off and bullied for being a terrible footballer. Nevertheless, he finds his own way into the game. During the Writing the Game week, the students met with David Bradley, who played Casper. He listened to the students talking about their week at Lumb Bank and then he pointed out the goalposts he had swung from as a reluctant goalkeeper in the film. “Look,” he laughed, “you can still see the dink in the crossbar.”

The “dink in the crossbar” is the perfect metaphor for Writing the Game. It is the mark made by those who have been written off as academic failures, those who tend, on the whole, to lack an interest in reading and writing but who have a passion for football. That passion can be a source of inspiration. It can lead to epiphany and triumph. Writing the Game has helped hundreds of young people, many from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, to discover new levels of self-confidence. The programme is not about drawing young people into writing through the ruse of football. The football and the writing stand side by side. Football is valued and writing is valued. By the end of the course, the students have blossomed and so has their writing. Often, they have gone way beyond writing about football; in many cases the writing has been revelatory.

The idea behind Writing the Game is simple: football can bring young people of all backgrounds together and can help them find a voice that deserves to be heard. It can be the gateway – the portal – into writing and the imagination. It can help young people develop both their sense of communal identity and individual creativity.

“I think for some of them the course has been a life-changer. Horizons have broadened, confidence has been gained and they have discovered a strength and a voice they didn’t know they had.” Nick Stimson, writer/tutor



**“THE FOOTBALL AND
THE WRITING STAND
SIDE BY SIDE. FOOTBALL
IS VALUED AND
WRITING IS VALUED”**



PREPARING THE PITCH

CONDITIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL WRITING THE GAME PROJECT

The residential aspect of an Arvon course allows for an immersive experience which can be transformational, but there are many important aspects to that experience which can be replicated in a non-residential setting. When planning a Writing the Game project in your own environment, we recommend you apply as many of the following elements as possible.

WARMING UP: CREATING AN INFORMAL CREATIVE ENVIRONMENT

'I didn't know I could write so good, I didn't know I could read this well, I didn't know that I could make poems, I didn't know that I could make good stories, that I could make people laugh.' (Student)

Arvon was first conceived as a way of engaging young people creatively, not to pass exams, not to understand the technicalities of writing – though both are often outcomes – but for the sake of exploring the imagination and creative expression, without being stifled by the pressure of the curriculum and attainment targets. Putting creativity and the imagination above all else is still a key element to any Arvon course and the result is that students, particularly those who find the technical side of writing challenging, can start to enjoy the process. This leads to more interesting, more imaginative work, which they can be proud of. With pride comes confidence and confidence enhances their ability to progress and their aspiration to achieve. As one teacher put it:



"Taking the levels away makes them a lot less anxious, I think that might be one of the things that might have disengaged the students because maybe they've put a lot of effort into a piece of work but maybe because it hasn't got all the technical accuracy it hasn't achieved the level they thought it would." (Teacher)

Key to the success of the Arvon model is informality and the fact that it takes place in an environment that is distinctly not school. On an Arvon residential, students do not wear uniforms, rules are minimal, the workshop spaces are homely rather than institutional and the writers are called by their first names. The distinction allows students to relax and to express themselves in a way that they may not feel they can at school. Even if you are running a programme within a school setting, it is worth thinking about ways that you can create an informal environment – perhaps by avoiding use of a classroom, working with writers and, most importantly, by encouraging fun, playfulness and creativity. It should be a project for young people and teachers to anticipate eagerly and enjoy. It should be out of the ordinary; it should be special.



BRING ON THE SUPER SUB: WORKING WITH WRITERS

“One of the tutors said to me ‘I’d never have thought of that, I’d never have said it like that’ and it makes you think, well they’re a proper writer and they think it’s got something about it, so it must be alright.”
(Student)

The apprentice model of learning is a founding principle of Arvon. We believe creative writing is a craft that can be learnt and one of the most powerful ways of learning is as apprentice to an expert. All Arvon courses are taught by two established writers, plus a midweek guest writer, who all share their experience and expertise with the group. Being in such close proximity with writers and hearing about their process, their challenges and motivations in an open and discursive environment allows students to identify with them as fellow writers, which can help to build self-esteem and aspiration.

We recommend bringing writers in to work with your group, even for a few sessions, as this contact can be invaluable, bringing a fresh perspective to the project and sowing seeds for new ideas. If you invite a guest reader, the visit should be a special event and it should be interactive – not simply a writer coming in from the outside and reading his or her work aloud, followed by a few questions. Ideally it is best if it can be a short reading followed by the writer joining in with the activity, sharing their opinions and ideas about football and the wider world and listening to the young people’s writing. Our online database features writers who have either tutored or read on Writing the Game courses for Arvon and would be ideal workshop facilitators or guest readers in your setting. This will, of course, have financial implications as professional writers will need to be paid for their visit. Arvon can advise on ways to fund and facilitate such a visit. You can find more information on writers that have been involved in Writing the Game at www.arvon.org/writingthegame





WIN THE GAME FOR US: TUTORIALS AND COMMISSIONS

“When the tutors give you feedback it’s dead personal. They don’t just say well done, they say something different to every single person, it’s proper genuine. It’s like they’re really interested.” (Student)

In a football team, one-to-one contact between a coach and a player is vital. Motivation is an important aspect of this relationship, with a coach urging the player to try different things in games. It is a way of making a player feel special and recognising them as a unique individual. Similarly, one-to-one tutorials are an incredibly valuable element of any Arvon course. They offer a rare opportunity for students to discuss their work in a safe and private environment. They tend to last between 10-20 minutes and might focus on an individual’s ideas, a particular piece of work, or look at how they might overcome challenges in their writing. Tutorials give the tutor a chance to get to know something about each student, their background, their families and their ambitions. Often this is revelatory, and out of tutorials comes a relationship of mutual trust and understanding. The tutorial should be a collaborative experience, both tutor and student scrutinizing the work together so that the student can learn, in a meaningful way, how to develop their own writing. It is also important to strike the right tone in tutorials. An overly critical tutorial can damage a student’s confidence and significantly set back their progress. Rather, they should be constructive, encouraging and empowering.



“You feel like they’ve got to know you, that they’re really interested in you. They want you to do well, and you want to show that you can do it.” (Student)

In football, a coach might take time to give a player a special instruction in order to impact the game. In literary terms, this is a commission and on a Writing the Game course, the commission is the most important aspect of the one-to-one tutorials. Like professional writers, each young person is given their own personal commission and the deadline of finishing it before the Gala Reading. Each individual commission is designed to follow through on something that has been said or has emerged in the tutorial. For instance, in one tutorial on a course at Lumb Bank, one girl talked about the language she and her family spoke at home and contrasted it with the foreign language, English, she spoke at school. She was set a commission to write about this. Here is her remarkable poem:

Who Am I?

I am a 15-year-old
a Kosovan
a Muslim
called Fjolla
You say hello
I say tungjatjeta
You say Merry Christmas
I say per hajr bajrami
Just because I don’t eat pork and believe in Jesus
doesn’t mean I’m not me or different
At home I eat Kosovan
Speak Kosovan
Listen Kosovan
Everything I do is Kosovan
When I am at school or with my friends
I speak English
Eat English
Listen English
Everything I do is English
like it or not I’m proud of who I am and where I’m from
Fjolla Bakolli



PLAYING THE GAME: SHARED EXPERIENCE AND THE BIG MATCH

Commissions can be very wide-ranging and varied but all should provide a framework in which the young person can work in safety and with confidence. It might be: 'In not more than 500 words, write a story about the greatest goal ever scored from the viewpoint of the goalkeeper who failed to save it.' Or: 'Write a poem that is ten lines long. Five lines will be about the house and street where you live. Five lines will be about the paradise you have just described when you went on holiday to Spain. Alternate the lines.' The commission might be a very personal piece of work. For instance, a commission for a girl who was being bullied: 'Write a poem that is no more than ten lines long and in each line say one thing that you would most like to tell the bullies.'

When these commissions are read out at the Gala Readings they are often the most powerful work.

"[You] could make the thing you're writing about your own, it's not just what everyone else expects you to do, it's got your influences, you've got to make it your own. You don't get much chance to do that normally, that's what I enjoy." (Student)

Key to the success of this programme is that students come away having enjoyed writing and having some understanding about how to generate material and focus on a task. Once those hurdles are out the way, students will have been given the tools to continue writing and developing their voice in the future. In our evaluation, participants noted that their self-confidence was linked to their sense of themselves as learners. It enabled them to reflect on their approach to learning and to discover new things about themselves.

"I didn't know I could think so well. I've struggled usually with thinking about things to put on paper but in the past few days people have pushed me to think more deeply about what I write. I didn't know I could think more deeply." (Student)

"It's not just about writing and football, it's cooking, eating, cleaning up, listening to music. You're all together, but every person is being their own person, so you're more independent. It's the whole package, not just one bit or another." (Student)

An Arvon course is unique in that it offers both an intensely individual experience and an intensely collective experience. The Arvon model is based on the idea that creativity is infectious and that the best learning takes place within a community of writers. Participating in group workshops, sharing work, and cooking and eating together fosters a supportive, collaborative environment in which students begin to discuss their writing, bounce ideas around and support, listen to and encourage each other.

On Writing the Game courses, the group play at least one game of football together. This match becomes one of the central events of the week, much anticipated and a future source of stories, myths and legends.

Chances are that the group taking part in your Writing the Game project will be a real mixture of footballing abilities, from the madly keen and devoted players with aspirations to play professionally to those born with two left feet. Some will be bursting with enthusiasm while others will be dreading the game. The trick is to make the Big Match an event in itself. Everyone's contribution matters. Each goal will be the greatest goal ever scored. Each save a miracle. Each kick a key moment. Afterwards the game can be written about, eulogised, fictionalised, made into legend. It provides terrific source material and brings the group together like nothing else can.



GOAL OF THE SEASON: THE GALA READING

"It's scary when you have to read out, but when I'd done it, it made me feel more confident. He's in set 1 and I'm in set 3 and he said my work was just as good as his. I'd never know I could be that good if we hadn't done this, because we'd never hear each other's stuff. So it's made me feel more confident, that I can be as good as other people if I try." (Student)

"In school I won't read out. It makes me nervous. I know people will take the mick if I get things wrong. Here you support each other cos you're all in the same boat." (Student)

Everything leads to the Gala Reading, it is the culmination and climax of every Arvon week or Writing the Game project, when each person in the group reads from new work they have produced during the course. The Gala Reading gives everybody something to work towards and it encourages them to have finished and polished at least one piece of writing by the end of the course. A mixture of stories, autobiographical work, poems and even short plays, the final reading celebrates each person's achievement. It is a big deal for many of the young people, being the first time in their lives they have ever read out loud something they've written which they are proud of, something they believe in. The results are often spectacular, transformative and deeply moving. Young people begin the course writing about football and football-related ideas and move onto writing about their world and their lives, and in consequence they put value on their own experiences and what they have to say. The Gala Reading is a celebration of that journey.

If possible, hold your Gala Reading in the evening and invite parents and friends and other members of staff. The young people should choose their best pieces from the work they have created. Give them time to rehearse and limit the number of pieces that each can read. A focused 45-minute Gala Reading is ideal. Invite the press. Encourage plenty of fanfare and applause. Make it an event that they will never forget.



TEAM SELECTION: PUTTING A GROUP TOGETHER

"I think it targets the boys and the girls who in schools tend to be forgotten about and I think the football manages to make writing a fun activity."

(Teacher)

The ideal group of young people taking part in a Writing the Game project should be those who are struggling with academic work, who write and read reluctantly and who see no connection between themselves and any kind of imaginative writing. Our evaluation revealed that schools have found the programme to be particularly beneficial to those students whose negative perception of their own ability to succeed, (rather than their actual ability) is an impediment to their progress and that Writing the Game had a transformational effect on their confidence and therefore their potential to succeed.

Diversity within the group will enrich the experience for everybody and, if possible, aim for a 50/50 gender split.

It is important that the majority of the group are football fans, but the course can work for everyone. There has often been a small percentage of young people on each course who show little interest in football and even some who actively dislike the game, but football is a medium that is so deeply engrained in the psyche of this country and so many communities across the world that generally, even those participants have had some relationship to or understanding of the game. Even antipathy can become a vital spur for writing.

The role of the accompanying teachers on a Writing the Game week is central to success. It is a core part of the Arvon model that teachers need to join in the activities, write alongside their students, and be willing to share their own work with them.

"On this course I have seen students, who will happily sit for an hour in a classroom and do nothing, do more writing than I can manage."

(Teacher)



SUPPORTING THE GAME: RELATIONSHIP WITH A FOOTBALL CLUB OR FOOTBALLER

All Writing the Game courses have taken place in partnership with local football clubs, and relationships have been established with Barnsley F.C., Plymouth Argyle F.C., Leyton Orient F.C. and Crystal Palace F.C. Most professional football clubs are eager to engage with local schools and community groups and can offer a range of opportunities to enrich the course.

A quick tour of the stadium and a brief roundup of the club's glories is always a good idea. It brings the young people directly into contact with their local club and reveals how much that club reflects their own identity. Football stadiums are places of legend, of wondrous events, of future glories yet to be won. Being in an empty stadium is an experience in itself.

Ask if the club can facilitate a meeting between the young people and a professional footballer. Let the young people interview the footballer. It's a great insight into the professional game and often dispels myths about the way footballers live and think.

Ask if the club will allow students to watch a training session. Watching their heroes in action can be very inspiring and stimulate ideas for pieces to write.

Ask if the club will set up a coaching session with the young people – even those who don't much like football. Allow them to fully experience the football environment, ideally playing a game in the grounds or nearby if that's possible.

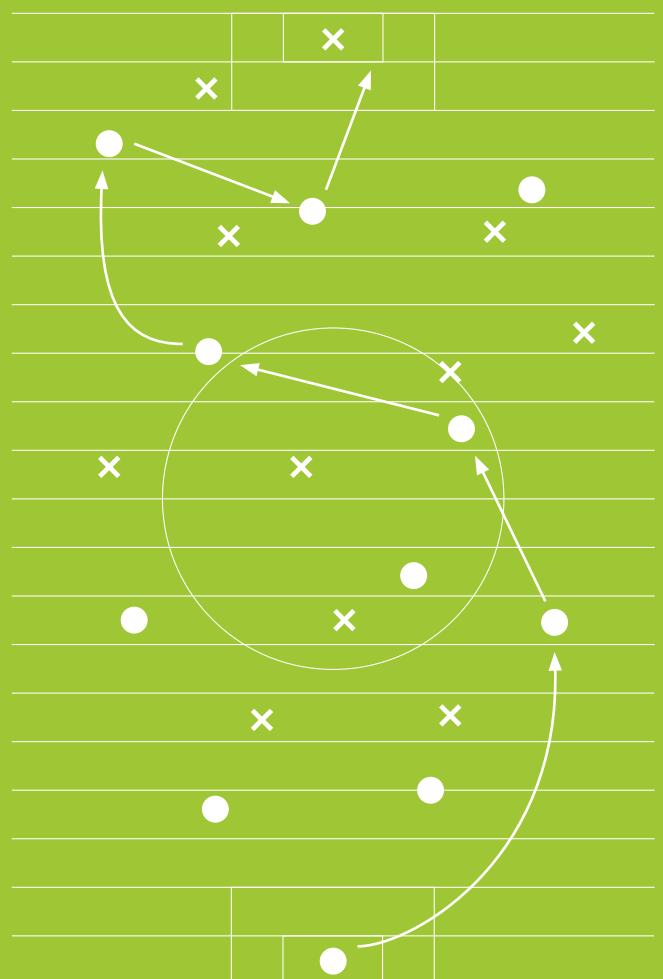
Clubs are very keen to encourage new attenders. See if they will give the group complimentary tickets for a match. Going together to a match as a Writing the Game group is a powerful experience.



POST-MATCH ANALYSIS: DEVELOPING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Writing the Game can have as much of an impact on a teacher, writer or facilitator as it can on the young people participating, and often involves treading new ground for everyone involved. It is 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.

Everyone involved in the project should take part in reflecting on it, from the teachers to the young people – the opportunities to learn from your experiences are many and varied.





MATCH DAY

CREATIVE WRITING EXERCISES



“It’s a fun thing to get your pen to paper and scratch your feelings. It’s taught me so many things that I didn’t think I would find out.” (Student)

Every morning as part of the Writing the Game programme students take part in workshops led by two tutors. Workshops are the lifeblood of every course, helping students to generate new work, experiment with words and ideas, bringing the group together to learn and have fun. The following series of writing exercises, ideas and tasks, have all been used in workshops on Writing the Game courses and have proven themselves over more than a decade.

The exercises are divided into three sections:

Stage One: Before the Match

Stage Two: The Match

Stage Three: After the Match

This gives a line of chronological development to the writing exercises as well as mirroring the match day experience. These exercises begin with a purely football-related focus and then begin to evoke an individual creative response from each young person. These exercises are not about success or failure but are stages along the way towards the Gala Reading.

This list is not exhaustive. Writing the Game is not set in stone, it is a constantly evolving organism and with each Writing the Game project new ideas emerge. Feel free to adapt to the particular needs of your students.



STAGE ONE: BEFORE THE MATCH

EXERCISE 1 ON YOUR SHIRT: AN ICEBREAKER

On the back of every footballer's shirt is displayed their name and their number in the team. The shirt is a means of identification. It helps those watching the game to identify who is on the pitch, but it is also a way for each player to assert their own individual identity. This exercise is a simple icebreaker in which students can use the familiar language of football to introduce and define themselves to each other.

AIMS:

- To help the group to get to know each other and learn each other's names.
- To acknowledge and encourage the expression of different layers of identity.
- For each participant to define who they are, in their own terms.
- To use familiar language symbolically.

METHOD:

1. Ask each group member in turn to say their full name – including middle names – and then the name they would want on the back of their football shirt. The name might not be their given name: it might be a nickname; they might choose their mother's surname rather than their father's; they might choose a place name, or a character they identify with from a film or book, a person from history or a person they might want to memorialise. It should be the name they would most like to be known by and the name which most captures who they feel they are.

2. Ask each person what number or position they might play in the team. This is an opportunity to use football as metaphor for character and group dynamics. Defining oneself as a defender or playing at the back, for example, may be suggestive of where that person sees themselves within a friendship group.

MATERIALS:

No materials needed

EXERCISE 2 BUILD UP: BEGINNINGS

The pre-match build-up is a crucial aspect of the match day experience. In the same way, the build up to writing is an important part of the process. Before any writing is done, it is important to start talking football with the group. Find out their opinions, their passions, their loves and their hates. Not all will love football and that is also healthy and creative.

AIMS:

- To get everyone talking and thinking about football.
- To establish each individual's relationship with football.
- To examine the many issues of football.
- To get the project going.
- To make the link between football and writing.

METHOD:

1. Discuss a selection of the following questions:

- Who in the group plays football?
- What's it like to score a goal?
- Who wants to be a professional footballer?
- What's so great about being a footballer?
- Who doesn't like football and why?
- Which clubs do they support and why?
- Who has ever been to a big match? What was it like?
- What does it feel like to be in huge crowd?
- What's so great about football?
- What's not so great about football?
- Is football over-hyped?
- Are footballers overpaid?
- Why do newspapers write so much about football and footballers?
- Should you have to pay to watch football on TV?
- Who is their favourite footballer and why?
- The best match they've ever played?
- The best match they've ever seen?
- Why is football so popular across the world?
- Why football matters or doesn't matter to them?
- How important to them is their local club?
- How important is their local club to the community?
- Why is it important to write about football?

2. Finish with a quick writing exercise: In no more than three sentences everyone writes a very short piece called 'Football and Me'.

MATERIALS:

Pens and notepads, or laptops

EXERCISE 3

WARM UP: ONE MINUTE OF NONSENSE

Just as footballers have to warm up before they play a game, so writers have to warm up before they write. This exercise negates any inhibitions about writing, engages the imagination and establishes the idea that writing can be separate from the academic. Work will be shared without judgment; writing will come to life. This is a much more important exercise than it might at first appear to be. Don't try to repeat it. This one works once and once only.

To the great majority of young people who are involved with Writing the Game, at first it appears to them that their writing is about being judged; it reinforces their own sense of failure; it is an alien and uninteresting activity. From the outset of a Writing the Game project, it is vital to completely change that notion of what writing is and what it means to succeed at writing. This is a simple exercise which draws immediate parallels between football and the act of writing. It's not about spelling, punctuation, comprehension or sentence construction. It's a bit of fun, but fun with a purpose.

AIMS:

- To write without inhibition or fear of judgment.
- To write spontaneously.
- To enjoy writing.

METHOD:

1. Begin by asking the young people what footballers always have to do before a game is played or a ball is kicked, and the answer comes back... they have to warm up! Got to get those muscles working, get the heart pumping, got to be properly prepared so you don't injure yourself. Explain that warming up is equally important when writing.

2. The teacher counts down from 60 seconds to zero. During that countdown the young people write without pausing or hesitating. Pens must never stop moving. Write, write, write as much as they can. No thinking time. No reflection. Automatic writing. Gibberish. Balderdash. Twaddle. The more twaddle the better. The countdown drives the exercise. The sands are running out. Got to keep writing. There's no engagement with the logical and critical part of the brain. Just get as many words down on paper as you possibly can. There will be laughter, shouts of frustration and incredulity, but keep pushing them forward. If anyone pauses then immediately get them going again. No thinking allowed.

3. At the end of the sixty seconds everyone stops writing. Students read out some random examples. Chances are, this will cause much amusement because the most ridiculous things will have been written. But, under the guise of having a bit of a laugh, several vital barriers will have been broken down.

MATERIALS:

Pens, notebooks



EXERCISE 4

MATCH FIT: FOOTBALL MAKES ME FEEL LIKE...

AIMS:

- To warm up.
- To explore feelings about playing a sport (or doing any activity you feel strongly about).
- To find new words to say the same things.

METHOD:

1. Hand out paper to each young person. Ask them to think about an activity they love to do – play football, sing, dance, etc. Write the following on the board and get them to finish the sentences:

I play football when...
I play football with...
I play football for...
I don't play football for...
I play football because...
I don't play football when...
When I play football I feel like...
When I don't play football I feel like...

2. Encourage them to write as much as they can – perhaps offer a minimum word count for each sentence, e.g. 'write at least eight words'.

3. When they have finished answering the questions, ask them to answer the same questions again but they can't repeat any of the words they used the first time. This means they will need to either find new answers or find different words for the same answer. Ideally, they will have at least five answers to the same questions, but feel free to keep going as long as you want them to.

4. When they have done the multiple answers, encourage them to reorder the sentences however they want and construct a poem or story using the sentences.

5. To extend the exercise, you can ask the students to remove the 'I play football' first half of the sentences, so they're left with only the answers. Then encourage them to play around with the sentences – which ones make the activity obvious? Which ones don't?

6. Then get them to construct a poem or story using only the answers, with the activity used as a kind of punchline at the end of the poem/story.

MATERIALS:

Pens and paper

EXERCISE 5

DRESSING ROOM BANTER: FOUND POETRY

Banter is an element of football which is shared by fans and players alike and in the build up to the game it will be rife. Banter draws from multiple sources and plays with language to create meaning. Similarly, found poetry is created by taking words, phrases, or whole passages from other sources and reframing them as poetry. A great example of a found poem is 'I Am the Walrus' by the Beatles:

I am he as you are he as you are me
And we are all together
See how they run like pigs from a gun
See how they fly
I'm crying
Sitting on a corn flake
Waiting for the van to come
Corporation T-shirt, stupid bloody Tuesday
Man you've been a naughty boy
You let your face grow long
I am the egg man
They are the egg men
I am the walrus
Goo goo g'joob

AIM:

- To allow even reluctant writers to write by using other people's words.
- To give people a chance to play with scissors, glue and paper for the first time since primary school – it usually brings the child out in everyone.

METHOD:

1. Explain what found poetry is, use 'I Am the Walrus' as an example and read out some of its funniest lines.
2. Gather together the sports pages of daily newspapers and magazines and get the group to go through them and cut out headlines or subtitles.
3. Gather all the cut-out headlines and subtitles together and jumble them up.
4. As a group, shuffle the headlines around until you've made a poem out of them. The poem doesn't have to make sense and you don't have to use full headlines. Don't be scared to use as many headings/fonts sizes as possible.
5. Lay the poem onto a large sheet of paper. Think about the layout and feel free to add in new words.
6. Stick the words to the paper.
7. Now you have a found poem that sounds and looks magnificent, get the group to read it aloud together – each person can read a different line.

MATERIALS:

A pile of newspapers and magazines, scissors, glue, large sheet of paper, marker pens

EXERCISE 6

PRE-MATCH CHAT: WHAT'S THE STORY?

When you arrive at the ground for a match and sit next to a stranger, you might start talking to them. You may only talk for 10 minutes or so, but you'll probably ask them some general questions about their life – specifically in relation to football. You are asking them 'What's your story?' They are asking you 'What's your story?'

This is the way writers of non-fiction approach their subjects. It is the way journalists, including football journalists, operate. They ask questions about a person's life – whether a football star or ordinary person on the street – and write a story based on the answers.

AIMS:

- To give students an idea of the different ways in which writers of non-fiction, particularly journalists, tell their own stories and those of others.
- To give students confidence in their interviewing, writing and communication skills.
- To give students a sense of themselves as writers.
- To make students aware of the issues surrounding truth, accuracy and bias in the telling of stories.
- To have fun and help students get to know each other better.
- To give students the experience of interviewing, note-taking and writing to a deadline.

METHOD:

1. Students pair off and interview each other about their lives, making notes (10 minutes).
2. They write up their notes into a story/article (10 minutes).
3. They take turns in reading out to the whole group the stories they have written about their partners.
4. Facilitate a discussion about how their stories were told by others – and what lessons we can draw about truth, accuracy and bias in the telling of stories.

MATERIALS:

Pens and notepads or laptops

EXERCISE 7

WHO'S GOING TO WIN, THEN?: FIVE MINUTES TO THREE

Imagine: City is a fictitious football club near the top of the Championship. It's Saturday afternoon and they are about to play their last game of the season. If City win, they will be promoted to the Premier League. If they lose, they will stay in the Championship. It's the most important game in City's history. Millions of pounds rest on the result but more importantly, so does the pride of the supporters and the local area. To make matters even more tense, City are playing Rovers, who are City's greatest and most detested rivals. It's five to three and the match will very soon be getting underway. In those five minutes before the referee blows the whistle, something very unexpected is going to happen. But what is it?

AIMS:

- To understand point of view.
- To learn about making creative choices, such as the identity of the narrator.
- To practice storytelling techniques using the structure set up by the premise.

METHOD:

1. Each person writes a story about what they imagine happens in those five minutes through the eyes of a narrator. Establish what a narrator is.
2. The group make suggestions as to who the narrator of the story might be.
Make it someone unexpected. Some possibilities might be:
 - A player in the City team.
 - A player in the Rovers team who was once rejected by City.
 - The City manager.
 - The girlfriend of a City player.
 - A sub who is angry at being overlooked and left on the bench.
 - A fan waiting to meet someone.
 - A fan who unexpectedly meets the person who will change their life forever.
 - A fan who hasn't got a ticket and is desperate to get in.
 - A person who doesn't want to be at the match because something much more important is going on in their life.
3. Each writes their story from their chosen narrator's point of view. It is written as a first-person narrative on one page only.

MATERIALS

Pens and notebooks, or laptops



STAGE TWO: THE MATCH

EXERCISE 8 THE WHISTLE BLOWS: THE FIVE SENSES

When you go to a football match your senses are alive: the feel of the cold plastic seat; the smell of onions and burgers and beer; the roar of the crowd; the dazzling green of the football pitch; the taste of a Balti Pie. It's a sensory overload. Just as it is when we write.

AIMS:

- To understand the importance of using our five senses when we write.
- To understand the difference between concrete and abstract language.
- To understand that the most effective method of description is not always the most obvious.

METHOD:

1. Students list the five senses. See. Hear. Taste. Touch. Smell. Establish that it is through our five senses that we gather almost all of our information about the world around us.
2. Students make a list of what else the senses might experience at a football match.
3. Explain the difference between vague abstract language and precise, concrete language and ask students to come up with a list of concrete words – things you can see, hear, taste, touch and smell, such as bus, sea, stone, flowers etc.
4. Ask students to come up with a list of abstract words. Things you cannot see, hear, taste, touch and smell, such as love, hope, soul, time, anger, excitement etc.
5. In silence and with their eyes closed, each individual thinks about a particular person they know but not someone they know very well. Not a member of their immediate family or a close friend but someone who intrigues them, someone they have noticed, someone they remember. Perhaps the person who runs the corner shop, a friend of their parents or the old man they see taking his dog for a walk every day.
6. Ask them: if this person were something they could see, what exactly would they be? For example, might they be a new red Ferrari driving along a deserted mountain road? Might they be an autumn leaf stuck to a pavement in the rain? Might they be a cold, half-eaten pizza abandoned and soggy in the sink? Each individual must come up with an image that precisely fits the person they are thinking about. This should be done quickly so that there's not much time for thought or reflection but rather they must trust their instincts, no matter how strange their pictures might be.

Each person writes down one line of description containing as much detail as possible.

7. With the same person in mind, they should do the same for all the other senses – one line of exact and detailed description: If this person were a sound, what exactly would that be? (the unstoppable scream of a jet fighter as it razors the clear blue sky?). Taste? (the sour, sharp tang of salt and vinegar pooling on a cold plate?); touch? (a raw steak still bleeding as it lies on your hand?); smell? (Sunday roast fresh from the oven?).

8. When they've finished, give them a couple of minutes to revisit their writing in order to make any changes and edits that would make the piece stronger. Read some of these aloud and let the others try to guess the sex and age of the person being described and what the writer thinks about them. They will each have just written a poem.

MATERIALS:

Pens, notebooks



EXERCISE 9

STRIKER, GOALIE, REF: CONCENTRATING LANGUAGE

This exercise establishes the extent to which football has its own language. This is a framed writing activity. It has clear boundaries and it sets out a clear task. Again, it's not about getting it right or wrong and all it requires is an immediate response without much planning or forethought. The immediacy of the task and the pressure to get it done in two minutes, hugely reduce the fear of failure in students who lack confidence in their writing.

AIMS:

- To create a framed writing activity about football.
- To concentrate language.

METHOD:

1. Work with the students to make a list of suggested football words and football terminology. Examples might include:

STRIKER, GOALIE, REF, CORNER, BACK PASS, RED CARD, TACKLE, SHOT, GOAL, PENALTY, OFFSIDE, FOUL, BICYCLE KICK, DEFENDER, FAR POST, KEEPY UPPY, ONE TWO, MAN ON, NUTMEG, HANDBALL, VOLLEY, SPONGE MAN, PHYSIO.

2. Each student chooses one word or one phrase from the list and writes down that word or phrase.

3. They now have two minutes to write four lines which capture an image suggested by their chosen word or phrase. The four lines might be in the form of a poem or a short piece of prose or it could simply be a list of images suggested by the word or phrase they have chosen. The four lines must not be an explanation of the word or phrase but must be a visual image or images. Remember the Five Senses.

4. Read out some of the results and discuss to start encouraging the idea that work will be shared and that this is not something to be afraid of. Ask for positive feedback from the rest of the group. What did you like about this piece? What works and why? Spot the strong words and images? How might it be improved?

MATERIALS:

Pen, notebooks or laptops

EXERCISE 10

KEEPLY UPPIES: KENNINGS AND WORD PLAY

Shin pads, hand ball, football. All these words are kennings. First used in Anglo-Saxon and Norse poetry, kennings are two-word phrases, which take the place of a one-word noun. Throughout the evolution of our language from the Anglo-Saxons to our present day, we have used these amazing little metaphorical devices to help us communicate.

The famous Anglo-Saxon poem Beowulf is full of kennings, for example:

- Body – bone-house
- Sun – earth candle
- Beach – seals field
- Sea – whale-road

Here are a few more examples of kennings:

- Owl – head twister
- Dog – postman chaser
- Penguin – tummy slider
- Lorry – gas-guzzler
- Football – pig skin

And Philip Gross's poem 'Daughter of the Sea' is an excellent example of how a poem can be created with a series of kennings.

AIMS:

- To explore the origins of the English language – and its amalgamation of cultures: French, German, Anglo-Saxon and Norse.
- To introduce students to figurative speech.
- To have fun with language and play with rhythm and rhyme.



METHOD:

1. Explain what kennings are.
2. Talk about the origins of our language, how it brings together French, German, Anglo-Saxon and Norse brought over to Britain by various groups including the Normans and the Vikings.
3. Split the group into smaller groups of four or five.
4. Give each group a single word, e.g. 'spectacles', and get the group to make up kennings for that word, e.g. 'visionary friends', 'eye supporters', 'glass eyes'.
5. Repeat the exercise with football words, e.g. 'referee': 'game guarder', 'whistle blower', 'card giver'.
6. Each group comes up with as many kennings as they can for their word.
7. Each group puts their kennings together and arranges them in the most rhythmic, poetic way possible. They can use alliteration, rhyme and rhythm.

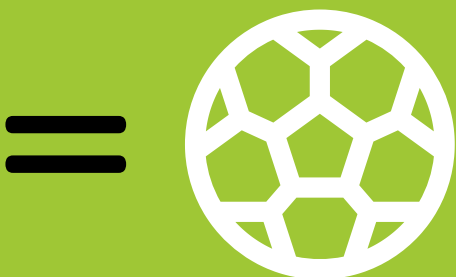
An example of a poem produced from the word 'fox':

Quiet prowler
Night howler
Free mealer
Chicken stealer
Rusty splasher
Hunter dasher

8. Each group reads out their kenning poem and the other groups have to guess what their original word was.

MATERIALS:

Pens, paper, examples of kennings poems



EXERCISE 11

IT'S COMING HOME: CROWD CHANTS AND SONGS

The buzz and excitement of being in a football crowd is addictive and glorious. Thousands of people all experiencing the same event at the exact same moment. Collective shouts of anger at the referee, the great cheer when your side scores a goal, the groan of disappointment when your team misses a penalty, the sigh of relief when the other team do the same. But the best crowd activity is the singing: rousing renditions of songs particular to the club or songs shared by all; new songs, old songs, funny song, true songs, often very rude songs; each stirring a sense of place, identity and the pride that fans feel in belonging to their club. As the legendary Liverpool manager Bill Shankly once famously said:

"Some people think football is a matter of life and death. I don't like that attitude. I can assure them it is much more serious than that."

This exercise is all about creating football chants. (Warning – this may well involve the teacher doing some singing!)

AIMS:

- To investigate the way that football songs and chants work and how they are constructed.
- To begin to 'hear' language as rhythm and rhyme.
- To break away from formal language.

METHOD:

1. Get the group to list (and sing) as many club anthems or football chants as they can think of. What's the anthem of your local club? What songs will you hear at your local club? What effect does each song have on the team or the fans? See below for examples and, if possible, play them some football chants and songs – there are thousands of recordings on the internet.
2. In pairs, students write a football song or chant. These songs and chants might be about a particular player or an opposition player or just about anything to do with the club or their opponents. The song or chant might celebrate the club and its glories, disparage a rival club, or perhaps reference a particular player. It can be about anything at all to do with football. It is important to have a lot of fun writing it but also to feel the way the words might fit the tune, to feel rhythm and recognise rhyme.
3. When they've finished one chant or song, get them to write another. The more they do, the easier it gets. Be mindful that these chants and songs are respectful to others and not using offensive language.
4. Students chant or sing the pieces they have written.

MATERIALS:

Pens, notebooks, laptops, football websites, YouTube, musical instruments (optional)

Examples of well-known football songs and chants:

- Chelsea's anthem is 'Blue Is the Colour'. Old fashioned, upstanding and inclusive.

***Blue is the colour, football is the game
We're all together and winning is our aim
So cheer us on through the sun and rain
Cos Chelsea, Chelsea is our name.***

- Crystal Palace's anthem is 'Glad All Over', a Dave Clark Five hit from 1964. It involves a lot of foot stomping and hand clapping and jumping up and down.

***I'm feelin' (clap, clap) glad all over
Yes I'm-a (clap, clap) glad all over
Baby I'm (clap, clap) glad all over
So glad you're mine...***

- Manchester United's 'Glory, Glory Man United' is sung to the stirring tune of the Battle Hymn of the Republic and evokes the semi-religious aspect of being a football supporter.

***Glory, glory, Man United
Glory, glory, Man United
Glory, glory, Man United
As the Reds go marching on on on***

- West Ham United's tender anthem 'I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles' dates back to America in 1918. Reaching for the glory that never will be.

***I'm forever blowing bubbles,
Pretty bubbles in the air,
They fly so high,
They reach the sky,
And like my dreams they fade and die...***

- Here's a Liverpool song set to the tune of She'll Be Coming Round the Mountain. This song firmly asserts the pride the fans have in the club's unique identity.

***'Cos we're not English we are Scouse,
'Cos we're not English we are Scouse,
'Cos we're not English,
We're not English,
We're not English we are Scouse.***

- Probably the most well-known of all football anthems and one worth quoting in full is Liverpool F.C.'s majestic 'You'll Never Walk Alone', a song taken from the Rogers and Hammerstein 1945 musical 'Carousel'. If ever there was a football song about shared identity and passion then this is it.

**When you walk through a storm, hold your head up high
And don't be afraid of the dark
At the end of the storm, there's a golden sky
And the sweet, silver song of a lark**

**Walk on through the wind
Walk on through the rain
Though your dreams be tossed and blown**

**Walk on, walk on
With hope in your hearts
And you'll never walk alone
You'll never walk alone**

**Walk on, walk on
With hope in your hearts
And you'll never walk alone
You'll never walk alone**

- Bobby Zamora was a striker who played for Brighton and Hove Albion. The Brighton fans used to sing this one to the tune of Dean Martin's 'That's Amore'.

**When the ball hits the goal
It's not Shearer or Cole
It's Zamora...**

- Fulham also had their less than complimentary song about Bobby Zamora.

**When the ball hits your head
And you're sat in row Z
It's Zamora...**

- A chant picked up by several clubs who were on terminal losing streaks when they were being humiliated in yet another game:

**We lose every week,
We lose every weee-eeek,
You're nothing special,
We lose every week**

- Sometimes the wit is turned against a particular player. Luis Suarez, famed not only for his football ability but also for his prominent teeth and his habit of biting opposition players earned this witty little song.

**Your teeth are offside,
Your teeth are offside,
Luis Suarez,
Your teeth are offside.**

EXERCISE 12

HALF TIME SUPPORTER: A FOOTBALL DRAMA

At football matches a 'half time supporter' is a derogatory term for people who don't support their team to the bitter end. This is an exercise about the drama of football and football as drama. Here's the scene and the setting:

It's coming up to half time in one of the biggest games of the season. The score is nil-nil. It's a nail-biter. If City lose this game they will drop into the relegation zone. It's been a long, tough season. There's a tense and anxious atmosphere in the stadium. The crowd are unhappy. City are playing well below their best. The referee blows for half time. People leave their seats and head off to buy burgers, beer and Bovril.

In the crowd are two apparently, devoted supporters – Person A and Person B – who always go to watch City together. They are season ticket holders and they sit next to each other. They never miss a home game.

As the whistle blows for half-time, Person A turns to Person B and says they are leaving the game and won't be returning ever again to see City play. Person B is shocked and surprised. Then the shock and surprise turn to anger.

AIMS:

- To create and identify the key elements that make a drama.
- To write a play with a beginning, a middle and an end.
- To write creatively with another person.



METHOD:

1. Discuss and demonstrate how to set out a play. All plays have two component parts: the Dialogue (what people say) and the Stage Directions (what the writer adds to describe the setting and the action). Here's an example of how to set out a script using a short scene with only dialogue and no stage directions:

GEMMA: Lend us a couple quid?

ADAM: Why?

GEMMA: Want a burger.

ADAM: Burgers cost three quid.

GEMMA: Then lend us three quid.

ADAM: No.

GEMMA: No?

ADAM: No.

GEMMA: Want one?

ADAM: Not lending you money... not after last time.

GEMMA: Not that again!

Here's the same scene with Stage Directions. It becomes clearer.

(THE REFEREE BLOWS FOR HALF TIME. THE CROWD BOO AS THEIR TEAM WALK OFF. GEMMA TURNS TO ADAM.)

GEMMA: Lend us a couple quid?

ADAM: Why?

GEMMA: Want a burger.

ADAM: Burgers cost three quid.

GEMMA: Then lend us three quid.

ADAM: No.

GEMMA: No?

ADAM: No.

GEMMA: (OFFERING ADAM SOME CHEWING GUM)

Want one?

ADAM: (IGNORING THE CHEWING GUM) Not lending you money... not after last time.

GEMMA: Not that again!

2. In pairs, students decide who their two characters are: What are their names? How old are they? Where do they live? Why are they together? What is their relationship to each other?
3. Each pair discusses the possible reasons why Person A is suddenly leaving the match and abandoning Person B. Perhaps for a long time they've secretly hated football and only now have plucked up the courage to tell the other person? Perhaps they are a boyfriend and girlfriend and one is dumping the other. Or perhaps Person A has found out something about Person B and doesn't want to be friends with them any longer.
4. Working together, the pairs have 20 minutes to write a short script. The script must include the following elements:
 - A beginning where we meet the two characters and understand who they are.
 - A middle where something important happens, namely one character announces they are leaving.
 - A definite end. Maybe one character leaves alone. Maybe both go. Maybe both stay.
 - Try to write dialogue in the way real people speak. Use their words. Use their accents and their slang. Imagine this is a real situation. No violence allowed.
 - Use stage directions to show where we are and what is happening.
5. When the twenty minutes is up, workshop some of the ideas, reading out some scripts or extracts from scripts. Chances are the action will unfold far too quickly and the reasons behind the action will be unclear.
6. Give them another ten minutes to put right any problems.
7. Act out the scripts.

MATERIALS:

Pens and notebooks, or laptops, space for acting out scenes

EXERCISE 13

SCORING THE WINNER: LIVING THE DREAM

Fantasy plays a huge role in football, as it does in writing. The phrase 'Living the dream' has become a common one in football, almost to the point of cliché. To a football fan the dream is seeing your team play beautiful football, win a game convincingly, come back from being behind to win dramatically, to win the League. To a player the dream is selection for the team, scoring a goal, leading your team to victory.

It's the great dream of many young people to one day become a professional footballer. With its promise of fame, riches and adoration, it's the key to the golden future. Every year professional football clubs recruit tens of thousands of young boys and young girls to train and work for the club, but only a fraction will make it through the ranks and all the way to the senior squad. Sometimes the number is as low as 1%. What happens if the dream is shattered?

AIMS:

- To investigate through fiction what lies behind and beyond the cliché and look at the reality of football compared to the fantasy.
- To write a fictional story.
- To give students an idea of how aspiration and ambition, as well as disappointment, are integral aspects of a footballing life – whether playing, watching or writing about it.
- To show the extent to which football reflects/mirrors life, and can be used as a metaphor for hope and disappointment in real life.

METHOD:

1. Introduce discussion about young footballers dreaming of making it in the game.
2. Watch documentary film *No Hunger in Paradise* by Michael Calvin.
3. Students talk about their dreams, ambitions and aspirations – in football and life.
4. Each student writes a story in the first person about a talented young footballer and the great dream. How did he or she get spotted by a professional club? What was it like there? What were the highs and the lows? What events happened to them? What was their expectation? Then one day the dream comes to an end. What happens to them? Did they discover another dream to follow?
5. Students write a second story about anyone who is living the dream, whether that dream was football or something else – singing, dancing, acting, business. How did they achieve their dream, did they hold on to it? What were the challenges, the joys, the disappointments, the proudest moments? Who were they before and how were they changed by success? What if it all went wrong? When did they do next?

MATERIALS:

Pens and notepads, or laptops, Michael Calvin's documentary *No Hunger in Paradise* (and a TV/computer to watch it on).

EXERCISE 14

BEYOND 90 MINUTES: WHAT I WAS/ AM/WILL BE LIKE

A football match is all about being in the moment – for the fans, for the players, for the commentators. But each match carries with it lessons and memories of the past – games previously played, trophies won, penalties lost etc. And every match is played with an eye on the future – where will this game place the team in the League? Where do the team want to be this time next year? How will each player's conduct and performance affect their career?

AIM:

- To get young people to think of themselves in a metaphorical way.
- To get young people to recognise the way they change over time, and how they might want to change in the future.

METHOD:

1. Hand out three small pieces of paper to each young person.
2. Ask them to write the words 'PAST', 'PRESENT' and 'FUTURE' as headings on each piece of paper. Ask them to think about what they were like in the past (when they were younger), what they are like now (in the present), and what sort of person they want to be like in the future.
3. Ask them to write down a description of themselves in the past, present and future on the paper—these descriptions can be physical (e.g. 'In the future I will be tall'), and/or personality-based (e.g. 'In the past I used to talk a lot'). If they are stuck, write a series of simple questions on a board to try and prompt answers that reveal things about the young people, such as: what are your likes and dislikes? What do you like doing? Were you big or small? What colour is your hair? What is your personality like? Will you be loud or quiet?
4. When they have something on each piece of paper, give the young people a new piece of lined paper. Ask them to compare their past, present and future selves to something else physical that exists in the world: an animal, or building, or toy, or something from nature. Explain that comparing yourself to something else is using either metaphor or simile (explain what these mean, with examples, if they don't know).
5. Once they've chosen something to compare their past, present, and future selves to, give the group 30 minutes to write a poem inspired by their past, present and future selves. This could be as simple as 'In the past I was like a X, because _____'.
6. Ask for volunteers to read out their poems.

MATERIALS:

Small pieces of plain paper, lined paper, pens/pencils.

EXERCISE 15

PLAYER OF THE MATCH: SUPERHEROES, SUPERVILLAINS AND SUPERPOWERS

Football is dramatic and like any drama it has its superheroes and supervillains, as well as the odd show of superhuman strength and ability.

AIM:

- To get students to consider what qualities make footballers heroes or villains.
- To get students to consider their own special qualities and why they might be a hero.
- To boost confidence and self-esteem.

METHOD:

1. Each student takes a blank piece of paper and draws a line down the middle of the page. On the left side, at the top of the page, they write 'SUPERHEROES' and on the right side, at the top of the page 'SUPERVILLAINS'.
2. Each person should write down the names of as many superheroes and supervillains as they can think of in five minutes.
3. Some say that footballers are modern superheroes – they have skills that seem superhuman: dribbling, speed, strength. Ask the group which footballers have superhuman skills, and why? Write their answers on the whiteboard.
4. Some footballers are always in trouble with referees; always arguing, always fouling, trying to cheat the officials. We can call them 'supervillains'. Some footballers are models of good behaviour, always playing the game with fairness and discipline. They are 'superheroes'. Discuss with the group which footballers they think are superheroes, and why, which they think are supervillains and why, and any they think are a bit of both and why.
5. Explain that every person has at least one superpower – it might be remembering things, it might be forgetting things, it might be caring for people or making them laugh. Each person writes down three superpowers they think they have.
6. One by one, each person tells the rest of the group what their three superpowers are like this: 'My name is X, and my superpowers are forgetting things, caring for people, and making people laugh.'
7. Each person takes one of their three superpowers and writes a short story or poem about a time that they used it to make things better for people around them. It could be that time they went to hospital to cheer up a relative by making funny jokes, or cooked a meal for a friend, or carried their parents' shopping home with their super-strength.
8. Go around the group and ask each person to read their piece to the group.

MATERIALS:

Pens, paper, whiteboard

EXERCISE 16

TELLING THE GAME: THE COMMENTATOR AS STORYTELLER

Football commentary can be as integral to the experience of watching a football match as the match itself, and some commentators are amongst the icons of the game. Commentary tells the story of the match, adds new layers and perspectives, builds tension, provides footnotes, explains referee or managerial decisions and creates an audible experience to complement the visual one. This exercise explores the art of commentary as a way in to exploring the art of storytelling. This is an exercise for later in the programme when the participants have got to know one another, are prepared to take more risks and are feeling more confident as writers.

AIMS:

● To encourage participants to think about point of view, personal voice, narrative voice, (first, second, third person) and tense.

METHOD:

1. Discuss the role of the commentator: they tell the story of the action as it happens in the present tense, heightening the action.
2. Demonstrate different kinds of commentary: start with one tutor entering the room and moving around the space while the other commentates, focusing entirely on the literal action. For example:

Mary puts her head round the door. She crosses the room, pauses beside Rupo and stares at his hair... etc.

3. Ask the students how the commentary could be made better. Demonstrate with one tutor performing the exact same action as earlier – entering the room and moving around the space – while the other commentates, but this time include thoughts and context:

Mary puts her head round the door. She's looking worried and scratching her head, 'why did I volunteer to do this', she's thinking. 'Next time I'll make sure someone else gets to make an idiot of themselves'.... etc.



4. Ask the students for comments. Which demonstration told a better story? Was the second commentary more compelling? If so, why?
5. Ask for volunteers from the group to perform the second demonstration. You'll need one person to enter the room and one to be the commentator in each demonstration.
6. Experiment with a volunteer providing their own commentary, i.e.:

And I'm coming into the room, looking around for Marcus. I know he's hiding from me, but I see his blue socks sticking out from behind the sofa and... I pounce.

7. Discuss what works in storytelling: stories are not just about action but about reflection – the internal world of the character, their uncertainty, indecision, dilemmas.
8. Discuss present-tense narration versus past-tense narration by talking about football pundits at half-time and full-time. Their past-tense narration is in the third person and when a footballer is interviewed about the game it is in the first person. The commentator is an observer, describing the action but unable to affect it.
9. End with a writing exercise: Remember an incident you observed where you could see what was about to happen but you couldn't stop it; an incident that you wished you could have stopped. Think about it and then write it in the first person present tense.
10. Ask some of the group to share what they have just written.

MATERIALS:

Pens and paper or laptops

EXERCISE 17

THEATRE OF DREAMS: PLAYING THE GAME

It's all very well to talk about football, to watch football and to write about football but the best way to really understand football is to play it. Taking part in a match is like taking part in a real-life drama and on Writing the Game courses, The Match is a highlight of the week.

The students taking part may vary, from the madly keen and devoted players with aspirations to play professionally, to those without much interest in playing the game. That doesn't matter – everyone can contribute. It is the ritual of taking part in a communal experience – and writing about those rituals from an individual, creative point of view – which is important here. Whether someone plays well or badly, scores a goal or an own goal, loves it or hates it, the game can be written about, eulogised, fictionalized, made into legend.

There has been some great writing about football matches. At Writing the Game courses at Lumb Bank, a tutor will often read out Ted Hughes' astonishing poem 'Football at Slack' before a match begins. The poem was written about the games played on the same patch of land – Slack Top – during the First World War. The students walk up to Slack Top, close to Lumb Bank, during the week. When they look around the valley and imagine the pitch darkening into no-man's land, it is a memorable moment.

AIMS:

- To give students an idea of how football, like writing, can be both a communal and individual experience.
- To give students an understanding of how involvement in an event affects the way you write about it.
- To give students an insight into how great writers have used football as a metaphor for much bigger issues.
- To look at the extent to which truth and accuracy play a role in writing about live events.
- To examine the extent to which myth-making is as important to non-fiction writing as it is to fiction.
- To show how individuals might perceive and report on the exact same event in completely different ways.

METHOD:

1. Students change into football kits and proceed to the patch of land that will become their theatre of dreams.
2. Students pick teams.
3. The Big Match is played.
4. The Big Match is analysed on the journey back.
5. The Big Match is written about. Students should reflect on every part of the experience: What was the journey like to the pitch? How did the conditions affect the game (matches at Lumb Bank have often been played on the

top of a hill in driving rain)? Who took it more seriously than others? Who scored the greatest goals? How does the way a person plays or approaches football reflect their personality? What was the journey home like? etc., etc.

6. Students read out their match reports.

MATERIALS:

A football, football kits, goalposts and ref's whistle for the match; and pens, notepads or laptops for writing.

Football at Slack

Between plunging valleys, on a bareback of hill
Men in bunting colours
Bounced, and their blown ball bounced.

The blown ball jumped, and the merry-coloured men
Spouted like water to head it.
The ball blew away downwind –

The rubbery men bounced after it.
The ball jumped up and out and hung in the wind
Over a gulf of treetops.
Then they all shouted together, and the blown ball
blew back.

Winds from fiery holes in heaven
Piled the hills darkening around them
To awe them. The glare light
Mixed its mad oils and threw glooms.
Then the rain lowered a steel press.

Hair plastered, they all just trod water
To puddle glitter. And their shouts bobbed up
Coming fine and thin, washed and happy

While the humped world sank foundering
And the valleys blued unthinkable
Under the depth of Atlantic depression –

But the wingers leapt, they bicycled in air
And the goalie flew horizontal

And once again a golden holocaust
Lifted the cloud's edge, to watch them.

Ted Hughes (1977)



STAGE THREE: AFTER THE MATCH

EXERCISE 18 WE WAS ROBBED: WHAT'S MY LINE?

When the match is over it is time to celebrate or mourn. And, almost immediately, it is time to reflect. If it has been a happy outcome, the reflection is on what was so great about the team, why did they do so well, who was the best player, what it means for the team etc. But if the team lost, the reflection is more critical. Criticism of the referee – who was clearly biased and possessed poor eyesight – and who 'robbed' the team of a fair outcome; criticism of players; but, mostly, criticism of the manager, who faces the press immediately after the game and has to explain why things went wrong.

Like football journalists, students need to ask questions, reflect on situations and then decide what the best 'line' or angle of a story is. Not all journalists agree on what was the most interesting/newsworthy thing a manager said in the press conference.

This exercise brings out three aspects of writing. First: writing under pressure, very quickly, to a deadline. Second: how to frame questions in order to get good stories. And third: an understanding of how stories are framed in different ways by different parts of the media, all of whom have different agendas.

AIMS:

- To give students an idea of how football journalists operate – both individually and collectively.
- To give students an insight into how to find out about a footballer or someone else's life – and the boundaries of questioning/writing about that life.
- To learn the skills of interviewing under pressure and the pressure of a press conference.

METHOD:

1. Show (on YouTube) a typical press conference in which a footballer/a manager/a guest speaker answers questions after (or before) a match.
2. Set up a room like you would a press conference and select an interviewee – a teacher, footballer or local celebrity perhaps – and someone to MC the event.
3. Students prepare questions to ask the interviewee.
4. Run a 'press conference' with questions being asked and answers given. Students take notes and use smartphones, cameras or audio equipment to record the press conference.
5. Students transcribe extracts from the recordings.
6. Students discuss the different quotes they got from the conference. Discuss what the best quote is.
7. Students write up the interview as a story, with a headline reflecting one of the discussed quotes.

MATERIALS:

Pens and notepads, or laptops; phones, or video cameras if possible.



EXERCISE 19

HOLD THE BACK PAGE: BEHIND THE HEADLINES

The match is over and it's time to find out what other people have said or written about it. Newspapers and websites deliver instant verdicts with a headline summing up a football reporter's view of the game. These headlines – often no more than six or seven words – are great examples of the art of concise writing. The most famous example of a great footballing headline was "SUPER CALEY GO BALLISTIC, CELTIC ARE ATROCIOUS" It was written by a sub-editor at The Sun called Paul Hickson after Celtic suffered their most embarrassing defeat, losing a third-round cup tie 3-1 to Inverness Caledonian Thistle, who were just five years out of the Highland League.

Concise writing can help sum up long, complex and difficult stories. It is a feature of social media, especially Twitter and Facebook. And it is a feature of short-form writing, especially short poems and haikus. Looking at headlines in newspapers is a fun way of emphasising how important and skilful concise writing can be, but how sometimes the nuance and subtlety of a story can be lost.

AIMS:

- To give students an idea of how to sum up a story in as few words as possible.
- To give students an idea of the art of, and imagination that goes into, headline writing, quoting famous examples in history, e.g. "Super Caley..." "Gotcha!" "Freddie Starr..."
- To give students an understanding of how people read stories in papers and websites i.e. often in a hurry.
- To give students an idea of the differences between tabloids, broadsheets and websites aimed at different markets and demographics.
- To give students an idea of the issues surrounding truth, accuracy and bias in headlines.
- To look at the art of concise writing, comparing headlines to tweets, very short poems, haikus etc.

METHOD

1. Split the students into small groups.
2. Each group looks at the newspapers from that day – first the back pages for the top football stories, then the front pages for the top news stories.
3. In their groups, they discuss which headlines work best and why. Then they pick their favourite one and write it on a piece of paper. Then they make up their own headline for a story and write it on another piece of paper. Both pieces of paper from every group are put into a box.
4. The box is passed around. Students pick out headlines and read them aloud. The others try to guess what the story is about.
5. Students compose a tweet, telling their version of a story in 140 characters.

MATERIALS:

A selection of that day's newspapers, pens, notepads or laptops

EXERCISE 20

THE MONDAY MORNING PULL-OUT: PUTTING TOGETHER A PUBLICATION

The match is over. Over the weekend it has been mulled over, its highlights discussed, its controversial points debated. Now it's time for a considered reflection. On Monday morning, a newspaper will often produce a 'pull-out' – a special section inserted into the main paper – which looks at all angles and aspects of the match. The penultimate Writing the Game exercise involves the whole group putting together a pull-out/newspaper/anthology/on-line magazine featuring the best pieces of the course. It will bring everyone together collectively to reflect on the course and also create a lasting document for the outside world to view.

AIMS:

- To give students an idea of how journalists put together a publication.
- To give students an understanding of the skills of editing, sub-editing and designing a pull-out/newspaper/anthology/on-line magazine.
- To learn how to work together collectively on a creative project.
- To collate and 'publish' their writing into something they can keep, distribute and show others.

1. Students elect an editorial committee to work on the production of the publication.
2. Roles are allocated by the editor, e.g. headline writers, sub-editors, image editors.
3. Each individual student collects together all the work they have done during the Writing the Game project and chooses their best pieces to submit to the pull-out/newspaper/anthology/online magazine.
4. The editorial committee should then decide which pieces to include and the overall layout of the publication.
5. The publication can then be created and distributed to everyone who has taken part in the Writing the Game project – as well as to the wider public.

MATERIALS:

Pens and notepads, or computers, and a printer.

EXERCISE 21

ALL TOGETHER NOW: SPEAKING CLEARLY AND LOUDLY

Every Writing the Game project should end with the Gala Reading. This can be a scary prospect for some so this exercise is designed to get students to practice reading their own work out loud and is particularly good for shy people who don't want to read when everyone is listening!

AIM:

- To get young people to be more confident when reading out loud.
- To practice reading clearly.

METHOD:

1. Get the whole group to stand in a circle, with you in the middle of the circle.
2. Reassure any shy/nervous students they won't have to read much, but that in order for this to work, everyone has to participate. Ask them to read the first line of a piece of their writing, one-by-one, in a big loud voice. Encourage them to stand up straight, hands out of pockets, looking up at the audience, etc.

3. After they have read the first line individually, tell them they are going to read their whole poem, but all at once. It might help to use a visual aid – e.g. 'when my hand is in the air, speak, when it's down, stop speaking'. Tell them their aim is to speak loudly, not to shout, but they need to be louder than you. Say you will count to three, and when you do, they all need to read their own poems, ignoring everyone else and focusing on their own words. When they finish reading their work, they need to start again and to keep going until you tell them to stop. Explain that if they are reading clearly enough, you'll be able to hear them if you're standing close. Start the count.

4. While they are all reading (this can be quite loud!) go around the circle and try to individually hear each child. After a minute or two, count them down again and get them to stop. This can be repeated a few times, mostly for their own fun (after they warm up a bit, they tend to really enjoy being 'allowed' to shout in class).

MATERIALS:

A piece of work and a loud voice





NEXT ON THE FIXTURE LIST...

FURTHER RESOURCES

FOOTBALL-RELATED EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES AND INITIATIVES

ARVON: WRITING THE GAME

Check out the Writing the Game webpage on Arvon's website. Here, you'll find more information and a 6-minute film about the programme, a link to Dr Caroline Murphy's Writing the Game Final Evaluation Report 2013-15, and a database of experienced Writing the Game tutors or other writers who explore football in their work, including their contact details.

www.arvon.org/writingthegame

SUPPORTER2REPORTER

Supporter2Reporter is a programme run by football clubs across the country, which aims to give young people real-life learning opportunities through reporting at sports events. The students take part in media training sessions, where they learn interviewing, presenting, planning, editing, and research skills before attending a match.

The programme works very well as a component or follow-up to a Writing the Game course, as was demonstrated when Arvon worked with Leyton Orient F.C. and George Mitchell School in Leyton. After their residential course, students from the school took part in a Supporter2Reporter programme offered by Leyton Orient Trust. This involved students interviewing fans in the Stadium to gather their thoughts on the latest signings and team performance. The students were then invited up to the press gallery, amongst other journalists and sports commentators, to watch and take notes on the match for their reports. A couple of students were selected to undertake a post-match interview with Os defender, and journalism student, Joe Widdowson. Andree Selner, Head of Education, Leyton Orient Trust said:

"I love delivering the Supporter2Reporter programme as it gives students a hands-on learning experience... it's great to give students the opportunity to see behind the scenes at a Club – especially for some who have never even been to a football match before."

To take part in a Supporter2Reporter programme, contact your local club.

THE LITERACY TRUST

The Literacy Trust have a number of football related projects and resources available on their website. Resources include: advice about how to get a football player to come and read in your school, football-themed writing exercises and activities, football stories and book reviews. Programmes include: Active Literacy, developed with The FA, which uses the power of storytelling to engage girls aged five to eight years old in team sports; Skills Academy which helps Year 7 and 8 students improve their reading, rewarding their progress by teaching them exciting freestyle football tricks, beatbox techniques and breakdance routines; and Premier League Primary Stars, which uses the appeal of the Premier League and professional football clubs to inspire children to learn, be active and develop important life skills.

literacytrust.org.uk/programmes/sport-and-literacy

FOOTBALL SCHOOL

Football School is a series of books, which use football to explain the world. Written by Alex Bellos and Ben Lyttleton, they are a fun, fact-filled way in to learning and reading. For information, activities and videos see the Football School website.

www.footballschool.co

THE SCHOOL RUN

This website has lots of advice and ideas to aid learning through football as well as lists of football books and other resources.

www.theschoolrun.com/10-ways-football-can-help-your-childs-learning

IMAGINE FOREST

This website is full of creative writing ideas and resources including this list of football writing prompts:

www.imagineforest.com/blog/football-writing-prompts

GENERAL CREATIVE WRITING ORGANISATIONS AND RESOURCES

THE POETRY SOCIETY

Poetry Class is The Poetry Society's online resource of general poetry writing exercises:

resources.poetrysociety.org.uk

NATIONAL WRITING DAY

National Writing Day is an annual celebration of writing designed to inspire people across the UK to get writing. Its message is simple: everyone has a story to tell and sharing it can be a source of pleasure and power.

www.nationalwritingday.org.uk

NAWE

The National Association of Writers in Education has plenty of resources, a database of writers who work in education, information about organisations who work with young people to get them writing and lists of creative writing books:

www.nawe.co.uk

ENGLISH AND MEDIA CENTRE

The English and Media Centre is an independent educational charity offering professional development courses, publications and resources for secondary and FE teachers and students of English and Media Studies in the UK and beyond.

www.englishandmedia.co.uk

DARE TO WRITE

A sourcebook designed to encourage young people to explore their creativity and imagination. With notebook in hand, children can begin a writing journey of free expression, exploration and personal creation.

daretowrite.org

CREATIVE WRITING BOOKS

PRACTICAL RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

Creative Writing Guidebook – Graeme Harper (Ed)

A comprehensive workbook covering fiction and poetry as well as scriptwriting, radio, non-fiction and writing for new media.

Creating Writers: A Creative Writing Manual for Schools – James Carter

A practical guide for developing literacy through creative writing at key stages 2 and 3.

A Creative Writing Handbook: Developing Dramatic Technique, Individual Style and Voice – Derek Neale (Ed.)

Techniques on scriptwriting for theatre, screen and radio; a set text from the Open University's Advanced Creative Writing course.

Creating Writers in the Primary Classroom – Miles Tandy and Jo Howell

A curriculum-aligned approach to building a community of writers in primary schools.

Our Thoughts are Bees: Working with Writers and Schools – Mandy Coe and Jean Sprackland

A useful and pragmatic manual for building partnerships between writers and schools.

The Gamesters' Handbook: 140 Games for Teachers and Group Leaders – Donna Brandes and Howard Phillips

A helpful resource for all kinds of teambuilding and group activities.

The Works: Every Kind of Poem You'll Ever Need for Literacy Hour – Paul Cookson (Ed.)

The Works is a series of six books that are a great source of poems, many on specific themes.

WRITING PROMPTS

1001 Brilliant Writing Ideas – Ron Snow

A wealth of creative writing prompts and story-starters aimed at children.

52: Write a Poem a Week. Start Now. Keep Going – Jo Bell and guest poets

Resulting from Jo Bell's online writing project, a year's worth of weekly writing prompts with explanations and examples.

642 Things to Write About – The San Francisco Writers' Grotto

Short writing prompts on a wide range of subjects, with blank space on each page for you to fill in your own responses.

The Practice of Poetry: Writing Exercises from Poets Who Teach – Robin Behn & Chase Twichell (Eds.)

The classic volume of prompts and exercises, for workshops or individual use.

The Five-Minute Writer: Exercise and inspiration in creative writing in five minutes a day – Margret Geraghty

The answer for 'I don't have the time' – exercises that help even the busiest person be a writer.

FICTION WRITING TECHNIQUE AND STORY STRUCTURE

The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers – Christopher Vogler

A guide to using the time-honoured 'hero's journey' narrative structure in your storytelling.

Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting – Robert McKee

A root-and-branch analysis of how stories function and how to make them work for you.

45 Master Characters: Mythic Models for Creating Original Characters – Victoria Lynn Schmidt

A breakdown of 45 basic character types and how to use them in fiction.

Short Circuit: A Guide to the Art of the Short Story – Vanessa Gebbie (Ed.)

A comprehensive collection of essays from leading authors in the field, including short theoretical discussions followed by exercises and suggestions for further reading.

POETRY WRITING, THEORY AND TECHNIQUE

Poetry in the Making A Handbook for Writing and Teaching – Ted Hughes

The classic guide for teachers and students, from the former Poet Laureate.

How to Be a Poet: A 21st Century guide to writing well – Jo Bell, Jane Commane & Special Guests

A new, practical and well-rounded guide, covering all aspects of the poet's life, from finding inspiration to preparing for performance.

Writing Poems – Peter Sansom

A detailed overview of forms and techniques from the veteran Arvon tutor and founder of The Poetry Business.

CREATIVE MOTIVATION AND DEVELOPING A WRITING PRACTICE

Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within – Natalie Goldberg

A zen-influenced but highly practical approach to the psychology and spirituality of the writing life.

The War of Art: Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Inner Creative Battles – Steven Pressfield

Soldierly advice on how to face down your own resistance to writing.

Zen in the Art of Writing – Ray Bradbury

Fizzing with enthusiasm and energy, motivational essays from the master of the sci-fi short story.

The Artist's Way: A Course in Discovering and Recovering Your Creative Self – Julia Cameron

A 12-week programme for healing past creative injuries and rediscovering the artist within.



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Since 2009, the Writing the Game programme has worked with schools across the country to inspire and engage young people; transforming their attitudes to writing, unleashing their creativity, building confidence, raising aspirations and opening up opportunities for them within and beyond education.

This resource is designed to help you take Writing the Game's well-honed structure and methods into any space where young people might come to learn or be creative. Reflecting the passions and interests of young people and drawing on Arvon's values and the creativity of professional writers, it is packed full of activities and exercises to inspire students and lead them into the world of their imagination.



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