

Creative writing: taking risks with words

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Introduction

IN *THE LITERARY WORLD* Philip Larkin, in characteristically wry fashion, observes:

I

'Finally, after five months of my life during which I could write nothing that would have satisfied me, and for which no power will compensate me . . .'

My dear Kafka,
When you've had five years of it, not five months,
Five years of an irresistible force meeting an
 immoveable object right in your belly,
Then you'll know about depression.

II

Mrs Alfred Tennyson
Answered
 begging letters
 admiring letters
 insulting letters
 enquiring letters
 business letters
 and publishers' letters.
She also
 looked after his clothes
 saw to his food and drink
 entertained visitors
 protected him from gossip and criticism
And finally
 (apart from running the household)
 Brought up and educated the children.

While all this was going on
 Mister Alfred Tennyson sat like a baby
 Doing his poetic business.

This poem outlines two contrasting but equally stereotypical views of the artist and the relationship between the author and his work. The first emphasises the pain and the sometimes fruitless work involved in the process of poetic creation – the conventional tortured author with writer’s block; while the second paints a humorously disengaged portrait of the Romantic poet floating through life in undisturbed creative oblivion. Neither is, perhaps, a particularly helpful stereotype, but Larkin’s poem serves neatly to outline two of the most common perceptions of creativity and the creative artist.¹

This chapter focuses upon the ways in which creative writing is perceived and the myths that so often exist around it. It looks to establish clearly what may be understood by the term creativity within the context of writing, exploring a number of manifestations of creativity. The connections between reading, writing and creativity are explored with practical applications to ways creativity can be encouraged in pupils through the careful and sensitive teaching of processes of writing.

The myth of the creative artist

Every writer – good or bad, young or old, professional or amateur – lives in the shadow of greatness. The evidence is all around us: *Kubla Khan* was, Coleridge claimed, written in the white heat of an opium-induced dream; *Frankenstein*, one of the most influential novels of all time, was astonishingly produced by the nineteen-year-old Mary Shelley; *On the Road*, Jack Kerouac’s masterpiece, was written in a frenzied three weeks of inspiration; and then we may go on to consider the extensive works of such undisputed masters as Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot and Charles Dickens. How did they do it? What was their inspiration? How did they attain their mastery of language, form and powers of narrative? How could they create such characters? It is no wonder that, for many, the process of writing is intimidating.

It is perhaps because of this that a mythology springs up around great creative artists. They exist in ivory towers of the imagination, in a rarefied world of letters; they stalk the streets of Paris or Prague or London in dreamworlds of creation, or live out lives of frugal and romantic isolation in garrets for the sake of their art. The artist becomes an artistic creation of the popular imagination, set apart from the rest of humanity. Because of this popular myth, not only the creative artist, but also creativity itself and the talents associated with it, are set up on a pedestal, the preserve of the select few.

And yet it is the very same act of ‘creation’ that we demand of children in the sometimes cramped, occasionally insalubrious and frequently time-pressured environment of the classroom. On a daily basis, pupils in their English lessons are expected to participate in creative activities using the written word – activities involving them in highly personal and often experimental work, where creative learning and development need to escape

banks of objectives and to move into the numinous relationship between the author, the written word and the reader. The role of the teacher in building stimulating and appropriate environments within which such creativity can flourish is central, especially in the increasingly pressured environment of the classroom, where creation on demand is often required.

Writing is work

For the majority of authors, including many of the most famous artists the world has known, the reality of writing is rather different from the stereotypical notion of the inspired and frenzied act of artistic creation. Too often the fact that a work of art is inspirational is enough for it to be considered as the work of inspired genius, and this encourages a skewed view of the true nature of the writing experience. Quite at odds with this view of the creative spirit, Thomas Edison once famously claimed that genius is 'one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration', reversing the popular myth of the genius as some kind of elevated vessel through whom inspiration passes and emerges as the 'work of art'. Edison, a pragmatist and a lifelong believer in the ethic of hard work, recognised that inspiration alone can count for no great work of creation. Creative productions are, after all, known as *works* of art. Initial inspiration there must be for any creative or original theory, discovery, piece of writing, painting, sculpture or musical composition, but once the inspiration has come the work begins. Charles Dickens was known for the phenomenal rate of his writing, at one time working simultaneously on the manuscripts of *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Oliver Twist*, one in the mornings and the other in the afternoons, while another of the great Victorian novelists, Anthony Trollope, who is also acknowledged as the founder of the first organised postal system, wrote to a strict regime, and even fashioned a desk to sit across his horse's neck so that he could write while travelling on postal business.

Inspiration alone does not account for all of creativity. Mozart was able to produce his final three symphonies in a mere seven weeks, and in the short span of his 35 years produced a vast amount of music of the highest quality. At the other extreme, however, Gustave Flaubert, the French novelist, would work for a day to perfect just one sentence, and James Joyce took 22 years to complete his controversial masterpiece *Finnegan's Wake*. The process of writing, even for the genius, is not always easy, but it involves a healthy amount of plain hard work.

Reading and creative writing

Debra Myhill has observed that 'Learning to write is at once one of the most commonplace and one of the most complex activities we ask children to undertake in school'.² Writing lies at the very heart of the child's school experience. The ability effectively to create with the written word in a wide variety of forms and for an ever-widening range

of purposes is central to the child's personal and intellectual development. The written word, rightly or wrongly, is also the foremost method of assessment under the current system in all areas of the curriculum, and, as such, pupils need to learn to function creatively in the written media.

To be fully creative in their engagement with the act of writing, however, creative response to written text as readers is also essential. It has become something of a platitude to observe that the way to become an effective writer and to develop a mastery of the complexities of writing is to read 'good' examples of such writing. This, however, is not an unproblematic assertion and it is important to evaluate the nature of the relationship between the read word and the written word. Gunther Kress, identifies the fundamental connection between reading and writing, observing:

Reading and writing are functionally differentiated aspects of one system, and of one set of processes. An exclusive concern with either overlooks essential characteristics shared by both. Most importantly, reading and writing are both activities that draw on the forms, structures and processes of language in its written mode . . . Hence neither the process of reading nor that of writing can be understood in isolation from the other.³

Let us consider what this implies. It posits a symbiotic relationship between the processes of reading and writing. An eclectic and avid reader will have a fuller frame of reference and a greater potential conceptualisation of the possibilities of the written word and the means by which authors seek to convey meaning and to influence their readers. Conversely, the more limited the reading experience of an individual the less they will bring to their own writing by way of such experience. These factors impact upon the pupil's ability as a writer in a number of ways in terms of:

- form and structure;
- syntax and vocabulary;
- the ability to read and critically evaluate their own writing; and
- the ability to respond to generic features and techniques.

Kress suggests that the success of the individual as a writer cannot be separated from their success as a reader; that the possession of skills in one area will necessarily transpose onto the other. He assumes no simple connection between the two, however. The act of reading itself cannot somehow lead to an osmotic transfer of ability from reading into writing. The reality is rather less clear-cut, as identified in a recent DfES publication: 'In spite of improvements at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 over the past three years, standards of writing, and particularly boys' writing, remain lower than standards of reading'.⁴

Kress, too, highlights this in describing the two processes as 'functionally differentiated'. They are two sides of the same coin – fundamentally attached, but facing in different directions.

The act of reading introduces the reader to language in action and opens the potential for engagement with it, but it is only with structured guidance that such contact can be

converted into the true engagement that broadens the reader's knowledge of language at work and deepens understanding of the potential of the written word. With appropriate teacher input, such as questions to provoke discussion of text, the exploration of authorial choices at word, sentence and text level; and the provision of differentiated reading support; the young reader can be enabled to approach and evaluate the ways in which writers achieve certain effects and the impact that these can have, thus providing a set of tools that can be used to emulate the effect. Such an approach is the technique of Guided Reading advocated by the National Strategy. The process is necessarily complex, however, and can never lead to a straightforward assimilation of knowledge and/or technique. It is even possible that the act of reading can lead to a crisis of confidence in the writer, whereby the proliferation of surrounding authorial voices becomes an inhibition to individual creativity.

Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*: creativity or originality?

In this work, a theory of poetic development, Harold Bloom identifies a series of six stages through which a writer develops, all of which are conceived in terms of a direct relation with other writings, or models.⁵ These he terms as follows:

TABLE 3.1 Bloom's six stages of the writer's development

clinamen	poetic misreading or misprision: the identification of weakness or incompleteness in the model
tessera	completion and antithesis: an attempt to 'complete' or make up the deficiency in the model
kenosis	a movement to discontinuity: a positive move away from the model, and advance into individualism
daemonisation	a movement to personalisation: the initial recognition and formation of an individual 'voice'
askesis	self-purgation: full movement away from the model
apophrades	the return of the dead: mastery of the individual 'voice' and the appropriation of the model.

Although a simplification of Bloom's complex hypothesis, this provides a useful starting point from which to approach writerly assimilation and the development of the creative 'voice'. Few writers will go on to develop a wholly individual voice, but the stages of development Bloom outlines can usefully be applied to the three different facets of creativity Robert Fisher identifies in Chapter 1: creativity as generation; creativity as variation; and creativity as originality. These can be linked to Bloom's stages as follows:

TABLE 3.2 Fisher's facets of creativity vs Bloom's stages

creativity as generation	clinamen and tessera	the young writer generates writing in directly recreative tasks in response to the model – an imitation of 'voice'
creativity as variation	kenosis and daemonisation	the developing writer moves on, looking to vary and develop the 'voice' of the model
creativity as originality	askesis and apophrades	the mature writer masters his/her own 'voice' and is now able to return to the voice of the model and to use it as a tool, with originality

Bloom's observations conceptualise writerly development entirely through the writer's relationship with his/her reading. Like Kress, far from positing a straightforward relationship between the two, Bloom suggests that the process of assimilation and mastery of the craft of writing and the metamorphosis of reading into writing is demanding.

Creativity and originality

The search for a creative 'voice' and its relation to the issue of originality is problematic. Indeed, the better read a writer is, the more difficult may be the task of finding a 'voice'; the possibility for perceived originality becomes increasingly remote the more an individual has read, and as such the conceptualisation of creativity must be adjusted accordingly. Many pupils develop greater inhibitions about their abilities to write creatively the older they become, as a direct result of their widening frame of literary reference and their growing perceptions of their own inability to be original. Pupils need to be introduced to the idea that creativity is not necessarily synonymous with originality.

This is an issue that Bloom addresses significantly. His theory of the development of the writer's 'voice' depends upon the notion that creativity can only exist in response to previous writing and may not include traditional conceptualisations of 'originality' at all. T.S. Eliot casts further doubt on this issue when he suggests that:

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.⁶

The entire concept of originality is thus challenged. He goes on to relate this specifically to the creative processes of the poet:

The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.

The act of composition is thus seen as a process of accretion and alteration, the storing and reassembling of salient ideas, techniques, words and images until they coalesce to form a new creative work. This is a useful concept to apply to the ways in which pupils learn the art of writing. Creativity is seen not as an isolated event but as an on-going process. As such, it is susceptible to teaching and learning. By targeting teaching at component elements of creativity, such as the formation of images, the use of the senses, the development of metaphor and simile and the forms and conventions of a variety of genres, teachers can facilitate the development of creative awareness and creative skills in their pupils.

What is creative writing?

The concept of creativity and its development in creative writing is problematic. Indeed, the term 'creative writing' itself presents difficulties. Arguably, any act of writing can be seen as a 'creative' act. Even in transcription the writer engages in an act of recreation, taking control of organising, paragraphing and punctuating speech, recording inflection and the speakers' pose in order to 'create' a documentary record. The writer, to communicate successfully, must enter into an active and imaginary dialogue with the reader. The act of writing is by its very nature both creative and dramatic. The concept of creativity should not be limited therefore. A letter written to a friend or to an imaginary recipient requires no less the functions of creativity than the composition of a story. The production of a piece of persuasive writing requires just the same creative engagement with the 'audience' as does the writing of a poem.

The following letter provides an example of the role of creativity within a response by a Year 7 pupil; the task required the composition of a formal letter of complaint about the content of an episode of the television police drama *The Bill*:

Example of a first draft – what are the signs of creativity?

Mr T.V. Programme
B.B.C. T.V.
London.

To Dear Mr tV programme,

I am write to complain about the vilonce I sore last night on last nights bill. Their were lots of times when I felt the need to turn over as lots of times I felt sickend. I am a great lover of the programme and look forward to watching it however, last night the programme portrayed the police in an unessassary light. I used to be a police man myself and the force that p.c. Quinnon was seen to use on that drug dealer was to explitic. Young people today have a very bad view of the police and this programme did not help there image. If my young granddaughter had seen the programme what would she had thought.

I hope you will note my complain and continue to make the bill in the fashion I have come acustome to.

While it contains a number of errors, this response demonstrates a number of important creative and imaginative characteristics:

- the views expressed provide evidence of an ability to express opinions clearly and appropriately, creatively engaging with a point of view;
- the pupil adopts a suitable register and tone to develop the reader's perception of the writer's 'voice', thus demonstrating the ability creatively to operate with language to build effect ('the programme portrayed the police in an unessassary light', 'continue to make the bill in the fashion I have come acustome to', 'I felt sickend');
- the pupil adopts a writerly 'persona' other than his own; this persona is developed by the provision of incidental detail ('I used to be a police man myself', 'my young granddaughter') to build the reader's impression of the ex-policeman grandfather;
- while rudimentary, the use of an address and the identification of an addressee demonstrate the writer's awareness of the purpose of this piece of writing and his abilities to create efficiently within the form required.

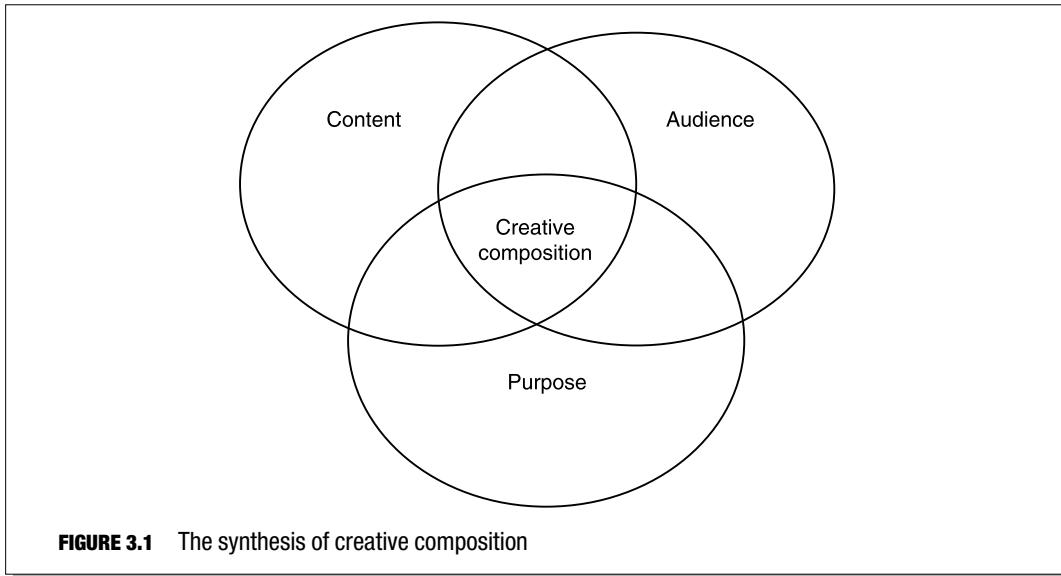
Selection and writing

In any act of writing, selection in three areas is essential. To produce an effective piece of writing, the writer must have a clearly defined sense of:

- content
- audience
- purpose.

The synthesis of these three elements constitutes the essential act of creativity in writing. Any written composition, regardless of its genre or intention, needs to establish an effective 'dialogue' between the writer and the reader. The burden of responsibility for the efficient operation of this dialogue, of course, lies with the writer – and it is precisely here that the writer needs to be most creative. Choices as to content, vocabulary, structure and reference will all define the extent to which the dramatic dialogue between the writer and the reader can operate. The writer needs critically to refine the relationship between the content, the audience and the purpose of the writing in order to create a text suitable for the reader. Such refinement can only occur effectively through a structured process of writing, which enables the writer to create a text suiting the needs of each of these elements.

It is essential that teachers introduce their pupils to a carefully structured process of writing and encourage them in the application of it, targeting each of these three aspects equally and ensuring pupils establish the key links between them.



Writing as process

One of the biggest dangers in the teaching of writing is that undue focus is placed on content at the expense of a detailed consideration of the creative process. Such a view encourages pupils and teachers alike to view writing as a product rather than as a mechanism; as a summative article of expression rather than as a formative tool in the development of thought.

The importance of writing as a creative mechanism of thought should never be underestimated. 'Fetch me a pen, I need to think,' Voltaire once famously quipped; and E.M. Forster, in one of the seminal works on fictional writing, commented: 'How can I know what I think until I see what I write'.⁷ Behind both of these observations lies the essential recognition that writing is an integral part of creation and creativity, not the end product of it. Teachers and pupils – if effective writing is to take place, and if an atmosphere of true creativity is to be established – must recognise the process of writing as innately valuable.

The process of writing may be broken down into the following stages:

A process for writing

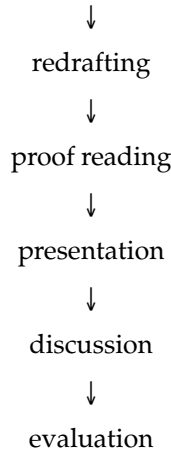
planning



drafting



editing



This may seem a cumbersome and lengthy process and may vary according to the conditions under which a piece of writing is undertaken. Equally, the central sections of the process may be undertaken more than once as a piece of writing evolves through a series of developmental redraftings. This model provides a thorough, reflective and interactive approach to the act of writing. It sees writing not as a terminal outcome but as part of an ever-evolving process. The genesis, development, presentation and future impact of the writing are all brought to the fore, enabling pupils and teachers alike to engage in detail with the writing at every stage. Teaching at the point of composition, in order to develop and improve, becomes an essential component of the work of writing. This model also suggests the importance of corporate responses to pupil-written text.

Another sequence for writing (outlined in the table on page 47) is suggested by the National Strategy.⁸ The right-hand column indicates the author's response to what each stage in this process suggests.

This model begins the process of writing at a different point. The integral link established in the early phases between the pupils' writing and teacher-provided exemplar materials is an essential basis for the preparatory work for the writing sequence. Exploratory reading and questions to prompt critical reflection can be used to introduce the pupils to the features, conventions and writerly tools ('how it is written') typical of a particular type of text. Here Gunther Kress's observation that 'neither the process of reading nor that of writing can be understood in isolation from the other'⁹ becomes significant. The introduction of pupils to a range of 'model' texts is an essential part of their development into effective writers. These 'models' can then be applied through the provision of writing supports such as writing frames. These can vary widely, restricting or opening the task according to the needs of the pupil and the purpose of the writing exercise. Writing supports must be thoughtfully applied to target pupils' individual requirements and to allow them to explore and play with the possibilities of the creative tools they are learning within their own writing.

TABLE 3.3 Sequence for writing

1	Establish clear aims	Clarify writing objectives
2	Provide example(s)	Introduce writing models
3	Explore the features of the text	Look into generic features of models
4	Define the conventions	Explain typical language/content conventions of the genre
5	Demonstrate how it is written	Teacher writes, employing generic features and conventions explored above
6	Compose together	Shared writing
7	Scaffold the first attempts	Provision of differentiated writing frames or other writing support
8	Independent writing	Independent application of writerly tools and generic conventions learned
9	Draw out key learning	Return to key features for reinforcement of learning
10	Review	Formative evaluation of uses of learning

The use of scaffolding techniques to support the pupils in their initial attempts at composition offer the writer the opportunity to operate at an interim level as a stepping-stone on the way to independence. Care has to be taken with the use of such scaffolding devices, however, as two potential dangers threaten

- that pupils develop an undue dependence upon the provision of such frames, so that they cease to be an interim aid and become an essential support; and
- that pupils can be constrained by the limits of the frame and thus find their creative urges to explore tasks in individual ways stymied.

There follows an example of a writing frame which is deliberately restrictive:

Example: a restrictive writing frame

In this activity, Year 6 pupils were required to write a journalistic account of events in the run-up to Noah's Flood (diagram page 48).

There are advantages and disadvantages to this type of writing frame in the development of creativity. The outlining of the content and presentation of the writing response remains firmly under the control of the teacher. This allows for a tight focus on the structural, formal, linguistic and stylistic features of writing within the journalistic medium by removing any concerns with regard to the content and organisation of material: the requirement for creativity in terms of the 'what' of writing is reduced to tighten the focus on linguistic and stylistic creation within the prescribed parameters of the writing frame. This is clearly of benefit to young writers who need to develop

HEADLINE	
SUB-HEADING	
REPORTER'S NAME	PICTURE
<p>INTRODUCTION</p> <p>To include:</p> <p>When</p> <p>Where</p> <p>Who</p> <p>What was found by the reporter</p>	
<p>MAIN BODY OF ARTICLE</p> <p>By-line</p> <p>Noah's viewpoint</p> <p>Neighbours' viewpoint</p> <p>Other organisations interested in events (e.g. RSPCA, local council)</p> <p>Quotes</p> <p>Noah's family's opinions</p> <p>Eyewitness accounts</p> <p>Spokesperson from the local church</p> <p>Weather forecasters</p>	
CONCLUDING STATEMENT / SUMMING UP	

skills within this area, or those who are effective *storytellers* but weaker *story writers*. Restriction of the writing task can provide positive benefits in terms of focus.

For stronger writers, however – those whom we may term ‘talented’ – such a frame may well prove restrictive in a pejorative sense. More secure in their grasp of the linguistic and stylistic requirements of the medium they may well wish to develop their ideas in a more fluid and less constrained way, breaking free from the prescribed content and format. This is not to suggest that writing frames have no place in the work of stronger writers – what is a genre of writing but a large-scale writing frame? – but rather to observe that a different and looser frame may prove beneficial. For such writers, techniques such as story-mapping may prove more effective tools, whereby the writer is required to develop a visual generic structure and plan for writing. Alternatively, the provision of an open stimulus, such as an object, a piece of music, a map, a photograph, a film or a picture,

accompanied by a structured introduction to, and ‘reading’ of, the stimulus in an act of collaborative planning can pave the way to more open-framed writing tasks.

The picture reproduced as Figure 3.2 was provided to a class of Year 6 pupils as a stimulus to a piece of writing with the purpose of conveying emotion.

The class, collaboratively, in small groups and individually, considered the picture, focusing particularly on the girl’s expression, her clothing, the background and her likely emotional state, developing, as they went, banks of vocabulary and devising a story map for their piece of writing. The only restrictions, aside from the purpose of the writing, were in terms of historical ‘time’ and location. Extracts from two examples of the work resulting are reproduced below.

Example of writing derived from picture

I had just finished painting the hills, fields and sheep when this girl about twenty-five years old came running towards me. She sat down on a rock in front of me and asked if I could paint her. She was Irish like me, I could tell by her accent. She could have run away from home, as many Irish immigrants had nowhere to go and no houses to live in. I had come here because of terrors in my hometown in Ireland.

As I started to sketch I saw a sadness in her eyes. This was understandable because coming from Ireland to Britain myself I know the things it puts you through. Trauma, depression and isolation – these are the things I felt and I started to wonder. There were a couple of possibilities. One: she could have left her family behind in Ireland, or Two: something had happened, for example, a tragedy.

As I thought these thoughts, I felt an anxiety to run away from this place and get on the next boat back to Ireland. But I knew I couldn’t. As I neared the end of my painting I glimpsed a man out of the corner of my eye, walking across the fields holding an oil lamp. The girl I was painting turned her head towards him . . .

The light was bright and as the man came nearer the light shone bright in my eyes. The sky was darkening and I put my hand up to shield my eyes. The man called out a name – I thought it was Patricia, but as the wind was picking up I couldn’t tell for sure. I was distracted by all of this and had totally forgotten about the painting and when I finally turned my head, the painting was gone and the man and the girl made off with the painting. I packed up with a sigh and started making my way towards my house at the bottom of the hill.

When I woke at dawn I was rested and after I had eaten I started to wonder where they had gone with the portrait. It was market day and I needed some paints and food. As I made my way towards the market square I thought about the night before and the girl’s face in my mind. I reached the town and brought my things home and got ready to set up my painting utensils. As I walked into the field I saw that the rock the maiden sat on yesterday was occupied again. I was



FIGURE 3.2 Picture stimulus: *Evening Thoughts* by Robert Herdman (National Gallery of Scotland)

amazed. When I got to the rock I saw the portrait of her I had done yesterday. As I sat down I saw she was crying. Her face was an island with streams crossing and intercrossing all over and eventually they ran into the sea at her feet. Her mouth

was an arch leading to a place full of sorrow and her eyes were a vortex trailing away to a distant place. She was a complete picture of total misery along with her life I thought suddenly. Eventually after a long five minutes she handed me my painting. Afterwards she sat in total silence watching me paint, sketch and draw. When the sun started lowering in the west, the clouds covered and again, the same as yesterday, I noticed the man with the light making his way across the moor.

This writer has clearly flourished within the freedom allowed by this type of writing frame, producing a composition containing evidence of sophistication and narrative flair:

- there is an almost metafictional 'discovery' in the use of the painter, as the writer undergoes a process of discovery in the writing – this demonstrates the writer's sophisticated sense of narrative technique;
- the writer confidently uses varied sentences and ellipses for emotional and narrative impact;
- there is an imaginative use of the persona of the painter to create the reader's view of the girl; the emotional states of both characters are explored;
- incidental use of detail from the picture – sheep, sky, rock – adds colour to the writing, functioning integrally within the overall impact of the piece;
- development of the context of Irish immigration provides a rationale for the girl's emotions and the painter's emotional response to her;
- striking use is made of metaphor in the concluding paragraph;
- suspense and uncertainty are created in the final paragraph as to whether we are looking at the portrait or the girl herself; and
- the possible conflation of the artist and the nameless man in the final paragraph hints at further possibilities of narrative depth.

Another example

She always came to the rock whenever she was depressed or sad. Her family were trading illegal tabaco for huge areas of land. She only found out a few days ago. She was so confused, bewilderd. She was seeing a man David Smith that her father had forbid her to see. So she did not want her father to find out because she was afraid he might beat her. She had to tell someone, just to get it off her chest. She could tell her boyfriend but she would have to trust him with the burden. Her love for him was so strong, she could trust him with any thing. She decided to tell him, she told him to meet her at the rock. A figure appeared on the hill and started to approach, but was it him?

This pupil is far less well served by the looser writing frame:

- the writing remains largely at the level of a simple narrative;
- the narrative provides background to the girl's emotional state, but does not creatively engage in building a fuller appreciation of these emotions;
- use of detail from stimulus – the rock, the land, the hill – is limited in impact; and
- the lack of concrete guidance with regard to content and structure has left this pupil, who would be better served by a more restrictive writing frame (see above), struggling to engage with the creative task demanded.

Shared writing and the creative process

Particular emphasis is placed, within the National Strategy, upon the technique of Shared Writing, an activity during which teachers and pupils collaborate in the creation of a shared text. Initially, the teacher writes while 'thinking aloud', linking language and content choices to the purpose of the writing and the needs of the audience. The pupils are then drawn into the process, and are likewise required to 'think aloud' as they share continued composition together, making transparent the thought processes lying behind their authorial decisions and discussing the impact of these decisions upon the reader. Such a corporate approach to writing has both its benefits and its drawbacks. While the verbally confident, in both written and oral modes, will be likely to contribute, those who are less confident in these areas – even where a supportive and mutually respectful classroom environment has been established – will be much less likely to offer their responses. The opportunity for such pupils to benefit from a detailed commentary on the writing processes involved in composition and to begin to evaluate the writing in critical terms, however, is clearly to be desired. Additional difficulties can arise where differences of opinion over content, vocabulary and stylistic choices emerge, although this can lead to fruitful discussions of the alternative materials under consideration if carefully and sensitively handled by the teacher.

Conclusion

The key to success in teaching creative writing is to teach pupils to enter into a critical engagement with their own writing. The two processes for writing considered in this chapter need to operate side by side in the development of independent, fully creative writers. Both models end with a recognition of the importance of review and evaluation, whether by the teacher, by the group, by peers or by the individual. This highlights the importance of formative assessment techniques in the on-going creative teaching of writing. Pupils must, with the help of their teachers, become involved in the active review of their own work so that they become aware of the importance of

the transference of skills between writing tasks and see their development as writers in sequential rather than in unitary terms.

The value inherent in each of these models is the focus on the 'how' of writing rather than merely on the 'what'. This makes for an interactive and developing sense of writing as an evolving skill. Teachers need to be encouraged into teaching at the point of writing, seeking ways in which to engage pupils in critical reflection on their composition and prompting them to explore the processes in which they have been involved.

Writing is about taking risks with words and structures. In the truly creative classroom pupils and teachers alike will push at the boundaries of a class's and the individual's achievement. While structured and focused teaching is clearly essential in the development of pupil literacy and in their growth as effective and creative writers, the imposition of too rigid a framework is ultimately stultifying. In a system increasingly driven by the needs and demands of assessment, it would be all too easy for the teaching of writing to be reduced to teaching by correction after the event, where engagement is a reactive response rather than a proactive force. If we as teachers wish our pupils to take flight as writers we must be involving them in a creative and exciting process of calculated risk – a safe process in which they are free to explore and to extend the bounds of their own originality.

Therefore, let the final word go to Thomas Edison: 'Hell, there are no rules – we're trying to accomplish something'.

Notes

- 1 Larkin, P. *Collected Poems*, Faber, 2001.
- 2 In *Better Writers* (Courseware Publications, 2001) Debra Myhill explores a range of practical approaches to children's writing.
- 3 'Interrelations of reading and writing' by G.Kress, in *The Writing of Writing* (ed. Andrew Wilkinson), Open University Press, 1986, presents a stimulating account of the cross-fertilisation of reading and writing as processes, exploring the complex but essential link between the two.
- 4 *Key Stage 3 National Strategy Improving Writing*, DfES, 2003.
- 5 Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, Oxford University Press, 1973, looks in detail at the issues of poetic inspiration in creative compositional processes, re-evaluating the place of originality in writing.
- 6 In 'Tradition and the individual talent', *The Sacred Wood*, 1922, T.S.Eliot reflects in detail on his own creative processes and argues strongly for the need for poets to create within the tradition of poetry. He significantly questions the extent to which any author can or should be totally original.
- 7 E.M. Forster's classic, *Aspects of the Novel*, 1927, offers an interesting insight into the elements and processes of fictional composition.
- 8 Key Stage 3 National Strategy, *English Department Training 2001: Writing Non-fiction*, DfES.
- 9 Kress, G. 'Interrelations of reading and writing', in *The Writing of Writing* (ed. Andrew Wilkinson), Open University Press, 1986.

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