

Creative Writing on Grammar School Level

LiLu2, January 2010

Creative Writing: What it is not

- unfocused and diffuse
- a waste of lesson / language practice time
- a linguistic free-for-all

Creative Writing: What it is

- opportunity to practice accuracy in vocabulary, structure (and style)
- extension of existing classroom activities
- grammar practice
- literary studies / text analysis
- writing practice with more student-focus

Areas of Creative Writing Activities

1. Warming up
2. Exploring language issues
3. Literary studies/techniques
4. Good practices in writing

Warming Up

- exploring senses, new senses and non-sense
- loosening the writing muscles / overcoming the fear of the blank page
- working with a partner to share credit (and passing on the blame)

Exploring language issues

- effects of grammatical forms (tenses)
- speech rhythms (prosody)
- patterns and rhetorical devices

Literary studies/techniques

- alternative ways of exploring literary texts (e.g. characterisation)
- exploring differences in tone and focus
- exploring techniques and constraints of form

Good practices in writing

- finding and developing one's theme
- brainstorming
- ordering content
- editing, editing, editing

Activities

Warm-up

Automatic Writing	
Purpose:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• loosen the writing muscles• get pen to paper• overcome the fear of the blank paper
Level	Intermediate and above
Material:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• none
Method:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. chose an evocative sentence/sentence fragment “Perhaps I shouldn’t say this, but ...”2. every student writes until time is up, without taking the pen off the paper, no thinking, no hesitation
Adding to dialogues	
Purpose:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “slow” language practice• written oral English, writing a conversation• writing with a constraint
Level	Post-beginner and above
Material:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a piece of paper per student• for intermediate to post-intermediate: a small piece of paper per student
Method:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. students sit in pairs2. each student starts a dialogue with one word, then swaps with her partner3. on the partner’s piece of paper, she reacts to the opening with 2 words, then swaps back4. the dialogue and the swapping continue, the utterance always being a word more than the previous one5. the dialogues are finished when one of the partners writes a 7-word response
Variation 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none">6. after the utterance of 7 words, the students continue swapping and

	writing, but with one word <i>less</i> than the previous utterance until the conclude the dialogue with one word
Variation 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. to begin with, each student writes one word on a piece of paper 2. these are collected and redistributed 3. this word opens the dialogue
Ping-Pong Poem	
Purpose:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • following a line of thought (association) • writing <i>with</i> a partner • playfully working towards a poem (free verse!)
Level	Intermediate and above
Material:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a piece of paper per student with space for a title and a column down the middle (can be done by the students in class)
Method:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. students sit in pairs 2. each student writes down a word (noun, verb, adjective) in the central column and swaps with her partner 3. on the partner's piece of paper, she writes the first thing that comes to her mind (free association) in reaction to her partner's word, then swaps back 4. they both continue until they have a column of about 8 words 5. now they write a line of "poetry" using the first word and swap again 6. reacting to the first line they now write a second line, using the second word in the column, then swap again 7. they continue until they have a line for each of the words in the central column. (<i>This can be surreal, silly, non-sensical</i>) 8. finally, the person who has written the first word names the poem 9. they read the poem out with "conviction"
Remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let students use different colours to write with • Hang up the final versions (after you have corrected the language)

Exploring language issues

10 Minutes	
Purpose:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explore the effect of present simple and present continuous • developing an idea • find a repetitive sentence structure • recombining elements to the best effect • editing their original statements
Level	pre-Intermediate and above
Material:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strips of paper • an A3 sheet between two students • glue-sticks

Method:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. students spend 10 minutes brainstorming sentences about what is happening in the world in these 10 minutes; they write individual statements about this on individual strips of paper 2. every student writes until time is up, without taking the pen off the paper, no thinking, no hesitation 3. 2 students combine their strips of paper 4. they rewrite the sentences to achieve a consistent sentence structure and verb form 5. they order their combined and rewritten strips (and discarding the less interesting ones) to make the text as powerful as possible, using association of subjects, contrast (e.g. men vs women), space (from local to global), etc.
Remark	this can lead to a discussion as to what makes a text effective, ordering, rhetorical repetition, etc.

Literary studies/techniques

Literary studies/techniques																									
Group Pantoums																									
Purpose:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• using form to make the best use of it• explore everyday language as a poetic medium• explore tone and focus through combining the same elements differently																								
Level	Pre-Intermediate and above																								
Material:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• every student has a sheet, which will be cut up into strips• an A3 sheet between two students• glue-sticks																								
Method:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. students in groups of 4 agree on a topic that they (or someone) would obsess about2. they brainstorm a number of one-line statements (6, 8 or 10 would do) that the person obsessing would think about/say to her- or himself.3. they write these statements down in single lines, which are then cut up into strips4. they split the group of four up into 2 pairs5. each pair combines these statements into a Pantoum6. finally they compare their versions to check how the texts differ (how the speakers of their poems differ)																								
Remark	this can lead to a discussion as to what makes the difference in tone of the various speakers																								
Pantoum Form	<table><tr><td>A</td><td>B</td><td>E</td><td>G</td><td>I</td></tr><tr><td>B</td><td>E</td><td>G</td><td>I</td><td>C</td></tr><tr><td>C</td><td>D</td><td>F</td><td>H</td><td>J</td></tr><tr><td>D</td><td>F</td><td>H</td><td>J</td><td>A</td></tr></table>					A	B	E	G	I	B	E	G	I	C	C	D	F	H	J	D	F	H	J	A
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Writing a Haiku	
Purpose:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • saying something very succinctly and briefly • include given elements to the best effect • “fight” with the form
Level	Pre-Intermediate and above
Material:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • two different colour small pieces of paper per student
Method:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. explain the form of the haiku (three line poem, first line 5, second line 7 and last line 5 syllables, a bit more flexibly handled with lower levels of language competence) 2. explain the content: must contain a reference a) to time, and b) a bug, a plant or a child 3. on one slip of paper they write an a) thing. 4. on the other slip they write a b) thing 5. the slips are collected, shuffled and redistributed 6. with the two new words the students write a haiku
Writing a Cinquain	
Purpose:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • as above
Level	Pre-Intermediate and above
Material:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one slip of paper per student • different colour small pieces of paper per student for variation 1
Method:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. explain the form of the cinquain (5 line poem, first line 2, second line 4, third line 6, fourth line 8 and last line 2 syllables) 2. each student writes a two syllable word or expression on one slip of paper 3. collect, shuffle and redistribute them 4. the word on the slip of paper must be either the first or the last line
Variation 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. each student writes two slips with 2 syllables on it 3. collect shuffle and redistribute them 4. the word on one slip must be used in the first, the one on the other in the last syllable
Variation 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. each student writes a word with a person with two syllables 3. the content is given <p> first line person second line adjectives describing the person third line -ing + verb extension fourth line anything that would bring this sentence to close last line two syllable comment </p>

Good practices in writing

A very special love poem	
Purpose:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• brainstorming• selecting carefully• developing an idea to the best effect
Level	Intermediate and above
Material:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• one large piece of paper per student
Method:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. all students, using a mind map, write as many features about a person that really means something to them (lover?)2. they should be encouraged to be as specific as possible and to include as many of the senses; this can be left to take a fair bit of time3. they are then told to strike out all the features that other people might have too; this leaves with the essence of the person, what makes her or him special4. with this feature they can then write a short poem (a haiku, perhaps two, a cinquain or perhaps two.