

CREATIVE WRITING TOOLKIT

TEACHER NOTES

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We have made this **Creative Writing Toolkit** to help students who are planning to submit an entry for the **CORPlus Creative Writing Competition**.

Teachers can use the five **Worksheets** in class to discuss some of the key aspects of creative writing (narrative perspective, character, plot and style), but the worksheets can also be used for 'self-study'. They have been designed for students with a level of English language proficiency equivalent to CEFR B1 (Intermediate level) or higher.

Creative writing is by definition creative and includes a wide variety of genres and styles. However, as most of the Creative Writing Competition entries tend to be narratives, the Toolkit deliberately focuses aspects of prose storytelling rather than, for example, song lyrics or poetry. At the same time, we have tried hard not to be prescriptive and for many of the questions asked, there may be different answers.

Worksheet 1 (Introduction/Review)

Using an extract from the award-winning young adult novel Skellig, this worksheet introduces the different aspects of a story, four of which (point of view, character, plot and style are explored in more details in other worksheets 1.2-1.5). It can be used as an introduction to the topics or as a review or both – which is why it appears twice in the Toolkit.

One way for Teachers to use this introductory Worksheet would be to give groups of students postcard-sized pieces of paper with the six questions from the Worksheet written on them.

..... Who is telling the story Who are they? Where does it happen?
..... What happens? How is the story told? What is it about?

The Teacher then dictates or writes on the board the key terms (e.g. point of view) and asks the students to write these on the correct cards.

The Teacher can then give the students a few minutes to think about a story they have read and then tell a partner about it using the cards as prompts.

The Teacher can then give out the Worksheet and, working individually, ask the students to read the extract and make notes in the six boxes before comparing their notes with a partner and then sharing with the whole class.

The story is set in the present day and the action takes place after the main character and narrator (a boy) moves house with his family and discovers a mysterious and magical creature in the garage. It's a novel about family, friendship, life and death written in a simple style that reflects the age and perspective of the young first person narrator.

Worksheet 2 (Narrative Perspective)

This worksheet is designed to help students think about narrative perspective.

The Worksheet takes a guided-discovery approach. Students read some short extracts and are asked to reflect on and answer questions about them.

One way for a Teacher to approach this is to just hand out the Worksheet and ask students to read and answer the questions up to and including: 'How is **The Road** different from the other three stories?' They can do this individually or working in pairs/small groups.

Alternatively, the Teacher could start by writing the opening line from *Moby Dick* (*Call me Ishmael.*) on the board and ask the students if they think this is a good opening sentence and why. Try to elicit the idea that the opening speaks directly to the reader. The Teacher could then suggest an alternative opening (*His name was Ishmael*) on the board and ask the students to say which one they prefer and why.

The second section of the worksheet and the last three bullet-point questions are more challenging and the Teacher may need to work with the class to elicit answers and explain the implications for the writer of choosing a particular narrative perspective.

The Road is narrated in the third person and the writer is the storyteller. Does this make him more even-handed and objective in his description of the man and his son – giving them equal importance as the central characters of the novel? If he had chosen to write the story from the man's perspective, of course he would have had to take on the role of writer and father and this would have changed his attitude to the boy/his son. How would he have described the boy's suffering? And can an adult writer ever tell a story honestly through the eyes of a child? These are the questions to be elicited and discussed in class.

Worksheet 3 (Character)

This worksheet is designed to help students think about different types of character in fiction.

Teachers can introduce the topic by putting the students into pairs A/B. The A students are asked to think of a memorable character from a story they have read and then to describe them to their partner (B). They have to talk for up to a minute. The B students are given a piece of paper on which there are some questions (see below) to guide their listening:

Did your partner:

- describe the character's age, gender and physical appearance?
- describe the character's personality?
- describe any changes to the character that happened in the story?
- make the character sound simple or complex?
- make the character sound like a good or a bad person, or a bit of both?

The Teacher can then give out the Worksheet and ask the students to compete the first task in pairs. Try not to help too much if asked to explain the meaning of the key words: **flat**, **static**, **round** and **dynamic**. There are clues in the words themselves (the ‘...ic’ ending of static and dynamic, for example, hints at how they may be related to one another).

For the final task, Teachers might like to consider asking students to read the extracts aloud, partly for the pleasure of doing this and partly to draw attention to the rhythm that is an interesting stylistic feature of the two descriptions (see Worksheet 5)

As a final task, the students might like to think back to the memorable character they talked about earlier and decide what kind of character they were. Note that they can have two character qualities. Dickens’s Ebenezer Scrooge is a round and dynamic character!

Worksheet 4 (Plot)

This worksheet is designed to help students think about story structure

This Worksheet is again designed on a guided-discovery basis and assumes the students have access to the Internet, either in class or at home The video of Kurt Vonnegut’s talk is short (4:00) clever and funny even if the sound quality is poor. If you can’t show it in class, give the Worksheet to the students and ask them to complete it for homework.

The Teacher can then ask them to report back to the class and explain Vonnegut’s theory about the shape of stories – or even draw some of the storylines!. The students can research the seven plot types to do the matching task although they should be able to do this using linguistic clues in the names and definitions (Comedy is possibly the most difficult as it is something of a false friend. Think – Romantic Comedy)

Teachers can then suggest the names of some famous stories (not just novels) and ask students to say what type of plot they are based on: Cinderella (rags to riches) and The Hunger Games (voyage and return), for example.

Worksheet 5 (Style)

This worksheet is designed to help students think about the language used to write a story.

The Teacher could start by eliciting from students the three different aspects or ingredients of style and then write these on the board. Under these headings they can then elicit more detailed ideas. Words, for example, can be long, short, poetic, vulgar, formal or informal.

The Teacher may need to explain the concept of figurative (as opposed to literal) language. There is a nice example in the second extract: ‘...rain danced on the steel tops of the cars.’

The Teacher could then ask students in groups of three to read the three texts silently and then each read one text aloud. Reading and listening can help to highlight some of the key features of style in the extracts and will hopefully make it easier for the students to take part in a group or class discussion around the final questions.